PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 287

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1996–97

COMPRISING PERIOD
9 December—18 December 1996

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9 December 1996

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 287**

FOURTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1996–97

House of Commons

Monday 9 December 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Service (Impartiality)

1. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many statements he has made concerning the Government's policy in respect of impartiality in the home civil service. [6494]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I am always ready to confirm the Government's commitment to a politically impartial civil service. I did so at the Dispatch Box just four weeks ago and I do so again today.

Mr. Jones: Has not one of the principal victims of 17 years of Conservative Government been the home civil service? Have not the Government always attempted to bully and manipulate our civil service? Will the Deputy Prime Minister take this opportunity to tell the House that in no way has he ever tried to bully or manipulate the Cabinet Secretary?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I realise that the Labour party has been out of power for a long time, but it grossly underestimates the reserve and resilience of the British civil service if it thinks for one minute that it would be bullied or manipulated.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does my right hon. Friend agree that although we are very fortunate in having an incomparable civil service in this country, nevertheless it has inflicted a number of wounds on itself in recent years by leaking?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The whole basis on which documents are now leaked is severely prejudicial to the good conduct of government in this country, and it is much to be deplored that it is encouraged and abetted ruthlessly and remorselessly by the Labour party.

Mr. Mackinlay: Is it not clear that the Government have been in office too long and that the widespread view, in all professions and at all levels, is that change is needed? Would that not also be a good signal and reassurance for the historical impartiality of the home civil service? The problem for the incoming Labour Government are the placemen and placewomen who have been put in charge of the quangos and who, overwhelmingly, are Tory friends and Tory plants.

The Deputy Prime Minister: If there were any validity in the idea that being in control for a long time demanded change, the first casualty would be Labour inner-city authorities, which have ruled their areas for much longer than we have ruled this country.

London Docklands

2. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what was the purpose of his recent official visit to London docklands; and if he will make a statement. [6495]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I last visited London docklands at the end of September to open a new footbridge at West India quay. That marked another step forward in the regeneration of the docklands.

Sir Michael Neubert: My right hon. Friend may be assured that he will always be welcomed as the architect

of London docklands development, for his part in the regeneration of east London and for redressing the imbalance between east London and traffic-congested Heathrow-dominated west London. Is he aware, however, that both the millennium project on the Greenwich peninsula and the proposed exhibition centre in the Royal docks will greatly benefit as potential sources of employment in the medium and long term from extra infrastructure, whether it be additional car parks to assist the river-road interface or an extra bridge crossing in the east of London? Will my right hon. Friend lend his good offices to progress in that direction?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am extremely grateful for my hon. Friend's kind remarks. The regeneration of east London must be one of the largest and most successful regeneration projects anywhere in the world. The results are quite incredible. The number of people employed there has risen from 27,000 to 69,000; more than 170 km of new and improved roads have been built; there is 24 km of new railway; and there has been the creation of an inner-city airport. It is a remarkable tribute to the Government and was brought about and made possible only by removing the powers of inner London Labour authorities.

Mr. Spearing: I share the view of the hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) in relation to transport infrastructure for public transport, particularly on the water, but I draw the Deputy Prime Minister's attention to Britannia village—the development opposite the exhibition centre at Victoria dock. Is he aware that of the 1,000 dwellings being constructed 75 per cent. are for sale and only 25 per cent. are for letting? The Deputy Prime Minister was responsible for setting up the London Docklands development corporation. In view of the fact that the land was publicly owned and many of the relatives and descendants of those who worked in the docks are having difficulty finding rented accommodation, would it not have been more to his credit and, indeed, that of the Government if the proportion were nearer 50 per cent?

The Deputy Prime Minister: No, it would not. Such was the saturation by publicly owned and let accommodation that anyone wishing to buy accommodation had to leave, thus impoverishing the area. That was one of the reasons for the area's decline. In the years since its establishment, the London Docklands development corporation has created a better balance—though by no means a majority balance—to encourage young people who want to buy their own homes to stay in the area where they were born rather than leaving for more prosperous areas.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: My right hon. Friend mentioned London docklands and reference was made earlier to the Greenwich millennium site. Will my right hon. Friend give careful attention to the river's potential for transport and leisure, which presents terrific opportunities from central London to the centre of the universe at Gravesend?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I assure my hon. Friend that those matters are never far from my mind, but I must also bear in mind the fact that many people prefer to use other forms of transport and have not yet come around to seeing river transport as their prime means of moving from one place to another. Such a change may be desirable, but this is a free society.

Mr. Beith: What does the Deputy Prime Minister think would happen to investment in docklands and in similar areas—and to the financial services industry, which is well established in docklands—if Britain were on the outside of a functioning single currency? Is Britain's participation still a serious option for the Conservative Government, given the reaction of Conservative Members to what the Prime Minister said on Sunday?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend set out the advantages and disadvantages extremely clearly, and he made his personal position and that of the Conservative Government clear. After the election, the House and the country will realise that we shall carry those policies forward.

Century Date Change (Computers)

3. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the effect of the century date change on computer systems within the civil service. [6496]

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Willetts): The effect of the century date change on computers is potentially a very serious issue for Government Departments, which we must address swiftly and thoroughly. A report from all Departments detailing the scope of the problem for each of them should be received in January. Every Department should have a costed plan in place by October 1997, and should have ensured full compliance of its systems, including testing, by December 1998.

Mr. Atkinson: I welcome my hon. Friend's assurance. Does he agree that it will not be enough to ensure that the Government's own computer systems will be millennium compliant? What is he doing to ensure that systems in the private sector, with which the Government's systems are connected, are also safe? Will he give full support on Wednesday next week to my ten-minute Companies (Millennium Computer Compliance) Bill to ensure that all business computer systems will be safe in three years' time?

Mr. Willetts: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his efforts to improve understanding of this important issue. However, although the subjects to which he referred will be covered in our review to prepare for the year 2000, the Government do not believe that a new statutory requirement on businesses would be the right way forward.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Have provisional figures been put on the cost of the necessary changes to computers by the millennium? Have the Government any idea what the cost will be? If so, have they built those costs into the Red Book projections?

Mr. Willetts: Departments are assessing the costs of the so-called millennium bug, and we expect them to have

a fully costed programme to deal with the problem by October 1997. We cannot include costs when we do not yet know exactly what they will be.

Civil Servants (Responsibilities)

4. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he last met the Cabinet Secretary to discuss the responsibilities of civil servants. [6497]

The Deputy Prime Minister: We meet to discuss civil service matters whenever necessary.

Mr. Mudie: Will the Deputy Prime Minister place on record his regret at the two recent Government attempts to force civil servants to breach their political neutrality? Will he also convey to the Cabinet Secretary the thanks of the House for his prompt action to stop that happening?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will know that, as there is no validity in either of his suggestions, there is nothing for which to apologise. It does no good at all for the Labour party to try to undermine the credibility of our civil service and to think that the civil service would have any involvement in the politicisation of its activities. That is not compatible with Government policy and it is totally inconsistent with the high standards of the civil service.

Mr. Nicholls: Is there not more than a whiff of cant in complaints about the politicisation of the civil service from a party which makes free and extensive use of leaked and stolen documents? Does my right hon. Friend accept that the only example of such bullying of which I have been made aware in recent days has been the Leader of the Opposition's bullying of his own Members of Parliament when they dare to step out of line?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I think that there is a degree of hypocrisy which of course I deplore, and I deplore nothing more than the document from the Labour party's Campaign group, which suggested—

Mr. Tony Banks: Come on!

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am coming on. That document suggested that Deputy Prime Minister's Question Time should be used to set the "sleaze agenda" and that, prior to my appearance before the Select Committee tomorrow,

"we should publish a dossier of 'Hessergate' scandals."

[Interruption.] I am only quoting from a Labour party document *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

If the House wishes to understand the lengths to which the Labour party is prepared to go, I will quote further. The document also states:

"We should publish data on the 20 'sleaziest' quangos, i.e. those with the greatest number of Tory connected members."

It goes on to say:

"These can then be presented as a 'random' selection."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) pointed out, a degree of extreme humbug is represented by the Labour party.

Mr. Prescott: Can the Deputy Prime Minister confirm that his co-ordinated group of privatised company cheerleaders has been forced to cancel its first rehearsal owing to lack of interest? And is that any wonder, given that up to 100 of his own Members of Parliament are refusing to support the Government's European policy in their election addresses? Is it not the case that the Tory party is a party that cannot be led, with a leader who cannot lead?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I see that the soundbite philosophy of the leader of the Labour party has now—some months later—percolated down to the deputy leader. I thought that we were talking about the behaviour of civil servants. Perhaps we should bear in mind what was said by the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) about a civil servant, as reported in the 29 November issue of the *Financial Times*:

"I remind him that there is likely to be a change of government at the next general election and he must be careful that he does not become one of the Benefit Agency customers he is seeking to punish."

I have never seen such a flagrant threat issued by a parliamentary Opposition to a civil servant—that if he did not kowtow to what is suitable for the Labour party he could be sacked if it won a general election.

Juvenile Crime

5. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make representations to the Minister responsible for deregulation in the Home Office in respect of the extent of the bureaucracy involved in dealing with juvenile crime. [6498]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman): The focus of the deregulation initiative is on legislation and procedures which affect the activities of the commercial and voluntary sector. However, the Cabinet Office has a continuing responsibility to ensure the minimum burden of paperwork throughout the public service. We have informed the Home Office and my ministerial colleagues of my hon. Friend's concerns.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Is he aware of the genuine concern following publication of the Audit Commission's report, which refers to the intense frustration felt by the Crown Prosecution Service and the police when dealing with juvenile crime? Of 7 million crimes committed by 10 to 17-year-olds, only 3 per cent. come to court, and for those cases to be dealt with 40 pieces of paper must be processed by the police. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is outrageous and that we must now try to introduce some common sense into the system?

Mr. Freeman: In normal circumstances, when a juvenile offender makes a guilty plea, only five forms are

necessary, some of which are designed by the police for their own use. In other cases, there could be up to 10. I think that the *Daily Mail* article was exceptional and does not represent the realities of everyday life.

My hon. Friend raises an important point, however. The process in the courts needs to be as simple as possible. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), as Minister of State with responsibility for the police, are considering today the outcome of a review of paperwork on juvenile cases. I will convey my hon. Friend's concerns to them so that they can take them into account.

Bolton Magistrates Court

6. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he next expects to visit the magistrates court in Bolton to discuss the appointment of new magistrates; and if he will make a statement. [6499]

Mr. Freeman: In February this year, I appointed 18 persons to the Bolton bench. My advisory committee in Bolton is interviewing candidates for the list of recommendations for 1997.

Mr. Thurnham: When can Bolton expect to see progress on its much needed new magistrates courts? Can the private finance initiative really deliver, or would it not be better to go back to the old system, when we were promised that the new magistrates courts would be built?

Mr. Freeman: Many right hon. and hon. Members know the Bolton courthouse. It has an impressive facade, but not a very impressive interior. It is important that it should be rebuilt. I am glad to tell the hon. Gentleman that the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has confirmed that the private finance initiative is appropriate for rebuilding the courthouse. I am pleased about that, and I shall follow progress with great interest.

Civil Servants (Numbers)

7. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many civil servants were employed by the Government and by Government agencies at the latest available date; and what was the figure in May 1979. [6501]

Mr. Willetts: When my hon. Friend asked me that question a year ago, the answer was that there were 506,000 civil servants—a reduction since 1979 of 31 per cent. There are now 487,000 civil servants—a reduction since 1979 of 34 per cent.

Sir David Knox: That is a very creditable achievement. Is my hon. Friend satisfied that there has been no deterioration in the service as a result of those reductions?

Mr. Willetts: I am satisfied that there has been no deterioration in the service. Indeed, in many sectors our rigorous measuring of performance quality has raised the standard of service and recently we celebrated the improvements at the chartermark ceremony.

Mr. Foulkes: Is it not therefore ironic that the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget speech that there would be additional appointments in Customs and Excise, the Health and Safety Executive and other areas, which he described as a "spend to save" package? Does that not show that over the past 17 years *cuts have resulted in catastrophe?*

Mr. Willetts: The Budget's "spend to save" package was an important part of the Chancellor's programme for securing Government revenues, but it does not alter the fact that the Government are committed to reducing the size of the civil service while ensuring the highest possible standards of service to individual customers.

Mr. Congdon: Does my hon. Friend agree that the best way of ensuring that the taxpayer receives value for money for services provided by the Government is to test those services in the marketplace? Will he assure the House that the Government will press on full speed ahead to ensure that all aspects of Government are so tested and that there is less waste, therefore, in Government services?

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend is correct. Market testing is an important way of holding down civil service running costs. In a previous debate, the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) announced that the Labour party would suspend all competing for quality initiatives—a spending pledge of £200 million per year, as those are the extra annual savings from our programme.

Policy Co-ordination

9. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his Department's co-ordination of policies as between Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and the English regions. [6503]

Mr. Freeman: The Government's policies are designed to benefit all parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. O'Brien: Is the Minister aware that in Yorkshire, due to pit closures and the loss of jobs and job opportunities, there is a serious lack of inward investment into my constituency and the Wakefield region? Is he further aware that as a result of the Government's policies the Yorkshire mining museum is under serious threat of closure, which would be a terrible disappointment to many of the mining communities, which would lose their culture? The imbalance between some regions is a serious problem. Will the Minister investigate the position in the Wakefield region, where inward investment is needed, and consider preserving the cultures and folklore of our communities?

Mr. Freeman: There has been a tremendous increase in the flow of inward investment into the whole of the United Kingdom. There have, of course, been some very notable investments, particularly in the north-east and I was pleased to visit the rail freight terminal in the hon. Gentleman's constituency—or very close to his constituency—a year or two ago. On the specific question about the Yorkshire mining museum, I was unaware of that project. I will certainly look into the matter and, with the help of my right hon. Friends, write to the hon. Gentleman about it.

Mr. Dunn: As the question refers to the "English regions", does it not provide an opportunity for the

Minister to condemn completely the policy of regional government—which may well involve my constituency being governed from Guildford or Reading or, worse still, being taken into a revitalised Greater London council—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—which would be a nightmare for the people of north-east Kent?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend as he has pointed out quite clearly the difference between the two parties. Not only have the Opposition promised a dozen or more referendums during any Parliament in which they happen to form the Government, but Labour is a party of regulation and not deregulation—which would mean new layers of government, not only in other parts of the United Kingdom, but in the English regions.

10. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what ministerial visits he has made to discuss the co-ordination and presentation of recent Government policy. [6504]

Mr. Willetts: None.

Mr. Winnick: As the Tory parliamentary party is now in a state of open civil war, is it not perfectly understandable that such visits are not taking place? Is it not unfortunate that the poor old Chancellor is being targeted and witch hunted, day in and day out, by so many of his party colleagues? Bearing in mind what was said last Friday by the hon. Member for Hendon, North (Sir J. Gorst), is not the solution to give the British people a break and to have an early general election?

Mr. Willetts: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is presiding over an economic recovery, which means that, for the fifth successive year, our economy is growing more rapidly than the French or the German economies. As for visits, all I can say is that, yesterday, the BBC visited Huntingdon, and it was a very successful visit indeed.

Mr. Steen: Should not the Minister have visited Brussels? Had he done so, he could have said something about the waste management strategy and the fire regulations, which would put an additional £2 billion on to the price of running British industry. Should he not say something about that to the Commission in Brussels?

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend has a formidable record of campaigning on deregulation. On the fire regulations, I can assure him that, after the lengthy process of consultation that has been undertaken, they will not impose any significant extra burden on British business. No final decisions have yet been taken on waste packaging.

Mr. Derek Foster: In his capacity as co-ordinator of Government policy, the Minister will be aware that clause 3 of the civil service code—introduced on 1 January 1996 by the Government, with all-party support—states that Ministers have

"the duty not to use public resources for party political purposes".

Is he also aware that I have tabled 18 questions to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his Cabinet colleagues on the cost to taxpayers of the Chief Secretary's scare over Labour's expenditure plans? Why has none of those questions been answered? What have the Government to hide? Is it that the Minister for open government, once again, is protecting the Chief Secretary—fellow of All Souls and master of sophistry?

Mr. Willetts: The costings exercise was conducted entirely in accordance with the rules on propriety in the use of civil servants. If a Minister asks a factual question of a civil servant, a civil servant should answer it. The Opposition are so sensitive about this matter because the Chief Secretary identified 89 Labour spending pledges—costing £30 billion.

Millennium Exhibition

11. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress he has to report on the private sector aspect of the financing of the millennium exhibition. [6506]

The Deputy Prime Minister: Good progress has been made in obtaining sponsorship beyond the core of original supporters, and leading UK companies have pledged support. Discussions with sponsors and potential sponsors are continuing.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: Does my right hon. Friend nevertheless share my amazement that some companies—British and international—seem incapable of realising the opportunities offered by the millennium exhibition both per se and, less altruistically, in relation to the benefits that would accrue from their supporting it? In addition to the admirable efforts being made by him, will my right hon. Friend ensure that his colleagues' contacts with successful companies are harnessed so that the exhibition is the success that it deserves to be?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. I am sure that the House realises the enormous opportunity for Britain in staking a claim to be the centre of world attention at the new millennium, and Greenwich could not be a more fitting home for that. A significant number of our leading companies have decided to support the festival, and many others are considering the situation. As the plans unfold, I have no doubt that the faith that has been shown in the project will increasingly be justified.

Mr. Raynsford: The Deputy Prime Minister will know of the widespread support and enthusiasm felt in Greenwich and, indeed, throughout south-east London for the success of this most important venture. However, he will be aware of some press coverage suggesting that there may be difficulties in achieving a balanced budget. Is he able to inform the House whether, to his knowledge, Millennium Central will be in a position to present a balanced budget to the Millennium Commission later this week? If not, what further steps will he be taking to ensure that the project can be brought in on time and within budget?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The House will realise that it is an enormous project of huge significance to the immediate beneficiaries—the Greenwich community—but also one which has necessarily had to unfold in a

complex arrangement involving many different public and private sector organisations. The Millennium Commission will be considering the position this week. I very much hope that it will be able to make a favourable judgment, but it will have to take into account a range of submissions put to it by many organisations.

Mr. Jessel: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many of us strongly support the millennium exhibition, which is of great national importance and will confer tremendous benefit, but that at the same time many of my constituents hope that matching finance will not be found for 10 pinnacles along the River Thames between Kew and Hampton Court, called millennium markers, which would be hideous monstrosities that hardly anybody wants and which were not adequately consulted on by the local authorities concerned, namely Richmond, Hounslow and Kingston? I hope that matching finance will not be found and that that idea will be dropped.

The Deputy Prime Minister: As always, I will bear in mind very carefully what my hon. Friend has to say. However, I must point out that the focus of attention at this juncture in history is on the festival itself.

Government Departments (Co-ordination)

12. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent review he has undertaken of his Department's effectiveness in the co–ordination of Government Departments. [6508]

Mr. Willetts: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister keeps this under continual review.

Mr. Grocott: On the co-ordination of policy on Europe, is it still the Deputy Prime Minister's position—a position that he explained repeatedly over the weekend, apparently without even blinking—that on Europe the Government are "one big happy family" and that any suggestion to the contrary is just malicious rumour drummed up by the press? To reassure those of us who are sceptical about that explanation, may we have one or two examples of warm messages of support for the Chancellor's position from the Secretary of State for Social Security, the Secretary of State for Defence and the Home Secretary?

Mr. Willetts: The weekend was illuminated by public remarks from the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Social Security, and they were all entirely in harmony with one another. If we are going to play this game of political happy families, it is the Opposition whose divisions on Europe should be investigated.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Perhaps my hon. Friend could persuade other Ministers to travel around the country a little more and co-ordinate their actions as they present Government policy, talking to employers and employees about the dreadful prospects for the country should the Labour party ever be elected to Government—dreadful prospects on issues such as the minimum wage, the social chapter, regulation and bureaucracy and, of course, Europe. With their comrades in arms, the Liberal Democrats, a Labour Government would sell out Britain's sovereign powers to the ever-burgeoning Brussels.

Mr. Willetts: My hon. Friend is right. Unemployment stands at 4 million in Germany and at 3 million in France, but it is down to 2 million here because of the success of our policies. For reasons that we cannot fathom, the Labour party seems to imagine that imposing the social costs and regulations that exist on the continent would enable us to improve our performance. That would just give us the levels of unemployment that countries on the continent suffer. The electorate will have to decide which party can best fight for Britain's interests in Europe at the Amsterdam European Council next June.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

International Aid Co-operation

20. **Dr. Goodson–Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent consultations he has had over the setting up of an international association for non–governmental organisations in relation to the delivery of overseas aid. [6518]

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Dr. Liam Fox): There have been no recent consultations over the establishment of an international association for non-governmental organisations. A number of NGO groupings already exist within the European Union and the United Nations system, as well as for British NGOs.

Dr. Goodson–Wickes: My hon. Friend will delight in the admirable work done by so many agencies around the world in places where strife causes terrible humanitarian and medical suffering. So much has been achieved that it may seem churlish to suggest that international aid agencies could deliver their aid more efficiently and with greater accountability. Will my hon. Friend again examine the merits of setting up an international aid co-operation body to ensure that aid is delivered as efficiently as possible, to reduce suffering around the world, bearing in mind that that is the view of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent?

Dr. Fox: We are constantly in dialogue with the NGOs. As I have said, there are a number of organisations in Europe and beyond. As independent organisations, it is for NGOs to monitor and evaluate their own performance to ensure that they remain cost-effective. It is not necessarily a matter for Governments.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Have the non-governmental organisations expressed a view on the Government's announcement, made at 2 pm today, of withdrawal from the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation? In international politics, is it not better to seek to reform institutions rather than to withdraw from them? I thought that that was the message in the Prime Minister's interview yesterday.

Dr. Fox: Naturally, in the hour and seven minutes since the announcement, I have had no representations from the

NGOs, which, unlike the hon. Gentleman, have probably not had time to digest the information. The Government must ensure that they get value for money from any organisation they are in. If UNIDO reforms itself and is seen to offer better value for money in achieving its aims, the Government may reconsider their position. However, that is some way down the road, because we do not currently believe that it is fulfilling the criteria set out in advance.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Does my hon. Friend think that most of Britain's overseas aid can be delivered more effectively through bilateral arrangements, or does he believe that multinational organisations, such as the European Union or the United Nations, should be the main engine for getting the most help to the people who need it most? Given our record, surely bilateral aid has an important role in ensuring that the poorest people get the aid.

Dr. Fox: My hon. Friend will not be surprised that the Government believe that our bilateral aid programme is better than that of many others. That is why, in this year's public expenditure survey round, our bilateral aid budget has been protected. I can confirm to the House that we expect the planning figures for the bilateral aid programme for the next three years to be no lower than the comparable figures published last year. Indeed, we expect them to be moderately higher.

South Africa

21. **Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking within the current financial year (a) bilaterally and (b) within the Commonwealth and the European Union to assist the development of South Africa. [6519]

Dr. Liam Fox: We expect to provide bilateral development assistance of around £20 million this year, mainly in the form of technical assistance, together with a further £15 million through the European Community. We have jointly funded projects with both the European Commission and the Commonwealth.

Mr. Anderson: Although our development assistance to South Africa is much valued and highly appreciated, does the Minister agree that, in many ways, access to European markets is even more important and that there is a yawning gulf between the profession of support for South Africa by many of our European partners and their crass protectionism in practice—for example, that of the Dutch in cut flowers, and generally in agricultural products? Will he continue to act as the advocate of South Africa in European Union circles and be ready to embarrass our partners for their failure in that respect?

Dr. Fox: The Conservative party is never afraid to be isolated in Europe on free trade or any other issue, and I am pleased to hear from the Euro-sceptic pro-free trade wing of the Labour party. It is extremely important for developing countries to have access to free markets. We believe that free trade and the encouragement of competition in a developing market are the best ways for any country to achieve long-term, sustainable prosperity. I agree absolutely with the hon. Gentleman that, in current negotiations with the European Union, we should be seeking not just rhetoric from our European partners, but action to back up what we sought in the first place—proper access to the European market.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Although I support aid to South Africa, we should ensure that it is not at the expense of the rest of southern Africa. Obviously, what happens in South Africa impacts on its neighbouring countries, such as Malawi, Mozambique, Botswana, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Will my hon. Friend ensure that we consider southern Africa and not simply South Africa?

Dr. Fox: The aid to South Africa and to other southern African countries is certainly not mutually exclusive. As my hon. Friend knows from our conversations—I am aware of his interest in the subject—we give substantial bilateral aid to Africa. Indeed, three quarters of all bilateral aid goes to the poorest countries. Therefore, we are very well aware of the points that he has raised.

Central Africa (Refugees)

22. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about aid for refugees in central Africa. [6520]

Dr. Liam Fox: Since January, the UK has committed more than £7 million bilaterally to address refugees' needs in the great lakes region. It remains our aim to encourage the safe, voluntary return of refugees to their homes. We are prepared to continue to help meet urgent needs as they arise.

Mr. Booth: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree that the crisis in central Africa illustrates the complexity of aid and that the only way to understand the success of the Government's aid programme is to aggregate not just the money, but the help provided to charities, the debt rescheduling and the humanitarian military aid?

Dr. Fox: My hon. Friend is exactly right. There are many different facets to aid. Let me add one that he did not mention: the ability to provide adequate information in crises. As has been mentioned in the House, the problem in the great lakes region has been bedevilled by a lack of information. My hon. Friend may wish to join me in paying tribute to the Canberra, which has provided such valuable information on the refugee crisis in that part of the world.

Ms Short: Does the Minister agree that the real lesson of the tragedy in Rwanda and Zaire is the failure of the world community to take preventive action? The backing of World Bank and International Monetary Fund programmes has impoverished Rwanda and exacerbated ethnic tensions. May we have an undertaking from the Minister that, now that the cameras have moved away, long-term action will be taken to help refugees resettle, assist survivors of the genocide and bring those who are guilty of war crimes to trial? Can he explain why, in the face of all that need, the Government have cut their aid budget yet again? When the Conservatives came to power in 1979, overseas aid represented 0.52 per cent. of gross

domestic product; it is now down to 0.24 per cent. Only 14 per cent. of that is spent on direct poverty alleviation. Is the explanation that aid follows the sale of arms, as appears to happen in Indonesia?

Dr. Fox: As I cannot debate the matter at length, I cannot correct the hon. Lady's figures one by one. She will welcome the new £10 million commitment announced by my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development on 20 November which was designed to assist with resettlement and the immediate needs of refugees. That is extremely important.

If there is a lesson for the international community in Rwanda and the great lakes, it is that any settlement must originate from the region; it cannot be imposed from outside. We welcome another conference being set up with the countries concerned. The world community cannot impose a settlement in the great lakes region; it has to come from the countries and the communities involved. Historically, outside involvement in the area does not work. A settlement needs to be found locally.

23. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his latest assessment of the situation in Zaire in respect of overseas aid; and if he will make a statement. [6521]

Dr. Liam Fox: The situation remains very unclear. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports about 250,000 refugees and displaced persons, about 75 to 100 km west of Lake Kivu, but substantial numbers of refugees remain unaccounted for.

Mr. Thurnham: Does the Minister agree that priority should be given to reconstruction in Rwanda itself, in view of the half a million or more Rwandan refugees still in Tanzania and elsewhere?

Dr. Fox: Yes, and we have committed a substantial amount of aid for that purpose. We have committed more than £145 million bilaterally and in support of EU actions in the great lakes region since 1993. Our aim is broadly in line with the hon. Gentleman's suggestion—in fact, I shall be visiting Tanzania in four weeks and I shall make those very points.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Bearing in mind the fact that good government is the criterion for much of the giving of British aid, what steps have Her Majesty's Government taken to press home the importance of good government to the Governments of Rwanda, Burundi and Zaire?

Dr. Fox: The Government, directly and through other organisations, make the question of good governance plain. Since my hon. Friend asks, there are four aspects to that: legitimacy, accountability, competence and respect for human rights and the rule of law. I am sure that the whole House is extremely aware that all those aspects have been called into question by recent events in the great lakes. The Government—and, I am sure, every democratic politician—take every opportunity to make those points to the Governments concerned.

Mrs. Dunwoody: The Minister will know, from his medical background, that example is better than instruction. He also knows that the people who are now refugees in that general area, irrespective of the borders, need help with the diseases that are killing them, such as dysentery. Those are straightforward diseases that could easily be dealt with. How much urgency lies behind the Government's real commitment?

Dr. Fox: There is, of course, a great deal of urgency. As I have said, we have committed a further £10 million in new assistance; but we are talking about the great lakes, not about Surrey, and one of our problems is getting access to the refugees and to some of the areas involved. For example, we have only recently—on 4 December—regained access to Uvira, and we expect the United Nations team to report back to us later today. When we have that information, we will be able to act.

The hon. Lady is well aware that, to try to take precipitative action, without knowing exactly what we are dealing with—what numbers are involved, where the people are and what conditions they are kept in—is completely pointless. When I stood at the Dispatch Box a few weeks ago, we were talking of the possibility of tens or hundreds of thousands of people dying because of the conditions in which they were living. Happily—to the surprise of all hon. Members, I am sure—the refugees turned out to have been in substantially better medical condition than many had feared.

United Nations Aid Target

24. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the effects of the Budget on the Government's plans to reach the UN target for aid expenditure as a proportion of gross national product. [6522]

Dr. Liam Fox: Our position on that target is unchanged. We have agreed to move towards it, but not to a timetable for doing so. Levels of development assistance will continue to depend on our economic circumstances and other demands on public expenditure.

Dr. Jones: Does not the Budget represent the latest in a series of cuts in the overseas aid budget, so that it is now expected to be only about 0.25 per cent. of gross domestic product—even less than the Irish aid budget? I remind the Minister of the explicit acceptance in the Conservative party manifesto for the 1992 general election of the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent. of GDP. Does that not represent the latest in a series of Government failures to honour their manifesto commitments?

Dr. Fox: I find that breathtaking, since the Labour party has not come forward with a timetable for reaching 0.7 per cent., unless the deafening silence from Opposition Front Benchers is about to change. This country has more than met the other UN target—to which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms Short) did not refer—for combined private and official flows; we are at 1.38 per cent. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Front Benchers scoff, but it makes no difference to those who receive aid whether the aid comes from the public purse or private flows. What matters is that they get the money for development. The unreformed left of the Labour party that I face this afternoon hates private money and would

rather see those who receive aid doing without the money than getting private money. Only the Netherlands exceeds the United Kingdom in the ability to provide private and public flows of money, and that is a record of which this Government are proud. The only appetites fed by soundbites are those of the media, not the hungry.

Mr. Nicholls: The Government are paying out substantial sums of money and many of my constituents will think it rather odd that such sums, which might be spent in Teignbridge, are nevertheless derided by Opposition Members. A pledge has apparently just been made to increase the amount of money that a Labour Administration would pay; can my hon. Friend say how much that pledge might amount to?

Dr. Fox: I am not that sure that, given my previous answer, that is something my hon. Friend wants to go into, because both parties are committed to moving towards 0.7 per cent., as has been pointed out already. The Opposition deride private money for some reason, yet it is private money that has been the motor for expansion of the developing economics. That is something we understand.

Ms Short: In Africa.

Dr. Fox: The hon. Lady says, "In Africa." That is exactly why we have targeted money, through our bilateral budget, on Africa and Asia. We know those countries are the poorest and that is why we have protected them in this year's Budget settlement. That is what the Opposition cannot stand.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

National Audit Office

29. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission what assessment he has made of the impact on the resources of the NAO of the repeated qualification of Department of Social Security votes and accounts. [6528]

Sir Terence Higgins (Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission): The National Audit Office's resources and procedures for certifying accounts provide for qualifying the certificate when necessary. Qualification involves additional costs for the NAO, including, for example, preparation and agreement with the Comptroller and Auditor General of reports on the accounts and consequent hearings of the Public Accounts Select Committee. However, as it is several years since the accounts all received unqualified certificates, the additional costs of qualification are not readily identifiable.

Mr. Mudie: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that, since its inception eight or nine years ago, the income support vote has not once been cleared by the auditors. Despite that, and the yearly attendance at the Public Accounts Select Committee by the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, nothing seems to change, except the excuses given. How many more times will the Select Committee and the auditors have to go through that exercise, costing the taxpayers billions of pounds, before someone is brought to account over that continuing and repeated shortcoming?

Sir Terence Higgins: I read with interest the hon. Gentleman's contribution to the debate on 16 October and I understand his concern. He will realise, of course, that that is a matter not for the commission but for the Public Accounts Select Committee and the Department. None the less, I have no doubt that the expenditure that the National Audit Office devotes to that problem and the work it is doing are worth while. I hope that that will eventually result in the hon. Gentleman's concerns being met more fully than they have been in the past.

Mr. Steen: Would it not be a good idea to have targets for reducing the amount of bureaucracy in all Government Departments, including the Audit Commission, not just for skilled and semi-skilled workers but for unskilled workers? If the Government are committed to reducing the civil service, should not the Audit Commission be committed to reducing the number of bureaucrats?

Sir Terence Higgins: I am not clear exactly who my hon. Friend means when he refers to the Audit Commission. He may mean the Public Accounts Commission, which has very little bureaucracy—as the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) will confirm. That is one of many aspects that the NAO has looked into, and it is important that it should do so.

30. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission how many staff with no professional accountancy qualifications are employed by the National Audit Office; what proportion this represents of the total staff; and if he will make a statement. [6529]

Sir Terence Higgins: The NAO employs some 728 staff. Of these, there are 419 qualified audit staff, 64 qualified accounting technicians and 98 people training for professional qualifications, making 71 per cent. of the total. It is important to note that a number of the remaining 29 per cent. have technical qualifications in other areas—for example, economics and operations research.

Mr. Greenway: In making evaluations of, say, education or a Government Department, is the NAO qualified to make judgments on policy, as it did recently on education and the running of schools? Does my right hon. Friend accept that some of us are puzzled that, in the middle of a financial evaluation, the NAO can make strong criticisms of the way in which schools are run? What does the NAO know about it?

Sir Terence Higgins: A considerable number of accountants are involved, but there are also a number of experts in other disciplines—including, I think, education—who can look at the matter, given the responsibilities of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the NAO for education.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Agricultural Holdings

31. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what is the current acreage of the agricultural portfolio administered by the Church Commissioners. [6530]

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): At 31 December 1995, the latest date for which figures are available, the Church Commissioners' agricultural portfolio comprised 137,185 acres.

Mr. Banks: That is an awful lot of acres, and I am sure that my constituency would fit easily into that area. What is the attitude of the commissioners towards fox hunting on their land? The right hon. Gentleman will be aware of St. Luke and the five sparrows sold in the market for two farthings—

"not one of them is forgotten before God".

What does God think about the fox that is hunted to death? Ecclesiastes states:

"a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity."

Given the fact that the Bible is quite clear that the destruction of animal life is anathema to the Lord, will the right hon. Gentleman—who obviously has the only hotline to God in this place—tell the commissioners to stop hunting on their land, otherwise their souls will be damned?

Mr. Alison: The hon. Gentleman should reflect that, nowadays, we also have the urban fox. My advice is that he should get hold of a red coat, a nice black top hat, a handy and reliable donkey, a pack of old mongrel hounds and a nice ouzo stirrup cup and sound the tally-ho in Newham, North-West in pursuit of the urban fox, and stop worrying about the shire foxes.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) does not know the difference between a fox and a badger? Is he also aware that there are many fine examples of hunters in the Bible? Will he recite the legend of St. Hubert to the hon. Gentleman? Will he ensure that the Church of England remains—at the very least—neutral on this subject?

Mr. Alison: I can assure my hon. Friend about the last point. Fox hunting has a great many proponents and a great many opponents, and the balance has to be properly struck. That is why we leave decisions on fox hunting entirely to our tenants and do not attempt to overrule their preferences. I am glad to know of the affection of the hon. Member for Newham, North–West for cats, as I understand that he is doing his best to preserve the lives of cats in the Greek islands. I very much hope that he is successful in that worthy, commendable and almost divine enterprise.

Clergymen's Widows (Pensions)

32. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, when the Church Commissioners last reviewed the level of pensions paid to the wives of deceased clergymen. [6531]

Mr. Alison: Levels of pension benefit for both the clergy and their widows or widowers are reviewed every year at the commissioners' annual general meeting. The revised rate agreed at this year's AGM in June takes effect from 1 April 1997, when the full basic rate of a widow's or widower's pension will rise by 3.5 per cent. to £5,890.

Mr. Cohen: When did the Church Commissioners last review the pensions and widows' entitlement for clergy who have served overseas? I understand that many people lose entitlement by ministering overseas. I am told that there even had to be a whip-round among the clergy for one bishop who had died. Have the Church Commissioners examined the position, and will they act on it and put some proposals before the House?

Mr. Alison: I have certainly never received any correspondence or complaints about the level of pensions for clergy serving overseas; in nearly every case, that is because they serve with a properly funded charitable society that would be responsible for developing and maintaining a pension for them.

Most clergy spend a period of their time in the parochial stipendiary ministry and then change for a time to some other engagement—for example, overseas. The period spent in the stipendiary ministry will entitle them at least to a partial retirement pension. However, if the hon. Gentleman has evidence of hardship, I shall certainly consider it.

MADAM SPEAKER'S STATEMENT

3.30 pm

Madam Speaker: I have a short statement to make about tomorrow's debate. The estimates day debate on the Cabinet Office: Office of Public Service, etc., was incorrectly reported as being class XVIII instead of class XVII. As a result, the wrong motions were printed. The correct motions have now been printed and are available in the Vote Office. I confirm that the subject of tomorrow's debate, as announced in Thursday's business statement, is access to Government information.

Orders of the Day

Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

In a democracy, politics and violence do not mix. Arms and explosives, illegally held and illegally used for political purposes, have for long bedevilled the politics of Northern Ireland and, more importantly, the lives of its people. They have to be removed from the scene. It is tempting to say that they must be eradicated. It is true that the police services on both sides of the border will continue to root them out where they can.

I believe that the whole House will wish to pay a warm and grateful compliment to the outstanding recent successes of both the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Garda Siochana. Vast potential for murder and destruction has been discovered, but it is unlikely that all the lethal weapons and other munitions in existence will be uncovered. In any case, time is very short, for the influence that those armaments continuously exert, even from their hiding places, obstructs the full success and, indeed, even the progress of the political process in which most of Northern Ireland's parties are engaged, together with the two Governments.

Expressed briefly, the natural fear is that the armaments are held on to in order that one day they may be used. Otherwise, what is their purpose? If that were correct, it would not be compatible with the exclusive commitment to peaceful methods and to the democratic process that is rightly required of all who seek in this democracy to negotiate its future. If that is judged to be absent in any party, no matter that it be an elected one, others will not sit at the table with it.

That is why such armaments have to be removed. That much almost everyone is agreed on: it is the easy bit. It gets harder when it is recognised that, illegal though it is to hold them, the yielding up of those armaments will be done either voluntarily or not at all. Therefore, to secure the best prospect of having them dealt with so that they are for ever out of harm's way, it is necessary to put in place a more sophisticated scheme than many would like.

I acknowledge that; but to those who bridle at the notion of helping terrorists to decide to get rid of their weapons, I offer this thought. A weapon which, in accordance with any such scheme, is taken out of commission can never kill in the future, as it may have killed in the past. A weapon which is retained in terrorist hands may well kill again, unless it is seized by the security forces before it can do so, which cannot be ensured.

No scheme of any kind can be constructed without a downside. But the thought that I have offered is the justification for seeking to put a well-judged scheme in place. That is the view of the Government; and we are fortified in that view by the international body, set up by the British and Irish Governments, when it reported in January this year.

[Sir Patrick Mayhew]

The body's remit was to provide an independent assessment of the decommissioning issue, and to report on the arrangements necessary for the removal from Irish politics of illegal arms. Chaired by Senator George Mitchell, working with former Prime Minister Holkeri and General de Chastelain, the body received oral and written submissions from each Government, from political representatives from all parties, from church and community leaders and many others.

Following careful examination and consideration of the issue, the body published its report on 22 January this year. I shall call it from now on the Mitchell report. It noted that

"everyone with whom we spoke agrees in principle with the need to decommission",

and that differences in timing and context should not obscure

"the nearly universal support which exists for the total and verifiable disarmament of all paramilitary organisations."

Her Majesty's Government's position on decommissioning is squarely based on the Mitchell report, which we fully endorse. We agree with the report's conclusion that decommissioning must continue to be a principal objective, and that it should receive a high priority in all-party negotiations.

The Mitchell report can be seen as falling into two parts—for this purpose at any rate. The first examines the question when decommissioning should take place. The second deals with how it should take place. But this Bill is germane only to the second part of the report. It is an enabling Bill. Its purpose is to enable the Secretary of State to give effect to Mitchell's recommendations as to how decommissioning will take place, at whatever time or stages may be decided.

The latter issue is, of course, of crucial importance. It is currently occupying the parties and Governments taking part in the political talks, which have been in progress since 10 June.

Strong views, as I am well aware, are properly held on every side. I do not intend today to seem to pre-empt, or even comment on, the negotiations. They are at an important stage at the present moment. I hope and believe that it will possible to reach a conclusion before Christmas.

I can, however, say that all the participants want to see the total and verifiable decommissioning of all paramilitary arms at the earliest possible moment. Whatever may be finally agreed about that, however, there will be a need for a mechanism and a structure to enable decommissioning to be achieved. They also all support the guidelines on the modalities of decommissioning set out in the Mitchell report. I am sorry about the word "modalities"; it really means the ways in which decommissioning can be carried out.

Since talks recommenced in September, after the break, it has become increasingly clear to both Governments that there was a need to introduce legislation to provide a firm statutory basis for decommissioning. Such legislation would be based firmly on the guidelines contained in the Mitchell report and would provide a context in which further discussion on decommissioning could progress.

So the Bill now before the House is, in parallel with proposed legislation which I understand the Irish Government intend to introduce very soon, designed to provide a statutory foundation for decommissioning, and the secure context in which discussions on decommissioning can move forward.

Before I turn to the clauses of the Bill, when I shall relate them to the Mitchell report, I hope that it will be helpful to explain the general approach that we have adopted in framing the Bill. This approach is also, I understand, to be adopted in the draft Irish Bill.

This Bill is intended to reflect, and enable effect to be given to, the six principles underlying the detailed guidelines which Mitchell has provided in paragraphs 39 to 50 of the report. Those were that the decommissioning process should: first, suggest neither victory nor defeat; secondly, take place to the satisfaction of an independent commission; thirdly, result in the complete destruction of armaments in a manner that contributes to public safety; fourthly, be fully verifiable; fifthly, not expose individuals to prosecution; and, sixthly, be mutual.

Central to the Bill is the concept of a tightly defined and narrow amnesty. It will be available only to those who adhere to the strict terms of a decommissioning scheme, and only for offences that they technically commit in respect of anything done in accordance with such a scheme. Those offences are specified in the schedule. They are mainly of a possessory character.

The Bill's provisions in no sense constitute some form of general amnesty covering other offences: the security forces will go on with undiminished resolution pursuing and bringing to justice those responsible for other crimes, irrespective of when or under what circumstances they were committed.

An independent commission forms a further important element of the Bill, but it will not be established by the Bill. Rather, it will come into being on foot of an international agreement between Her Majesty's Government and the Government of the Republic of Ireland. That agreement will set out in clear terms the role and nature of the commission, and how it is to be constituted.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): With regard to the international commission, will the Secretary of State confirm that it is merely a technical commission and that it will never make political judgments?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The international commission's role will, like most other things, depend on what may be agreed in the course of the negotiations. Its purpose is to provide a means by which the process of decommissioning can be structured, supervised and implemented. Its full role, however, will depend on what is agreed, and that is a sensible basis for it at present.

The Bill has 11 clauses and one schedule. Clause 1 defines the term, "decommissioning scheme", for the purposes of the Bill; generally, it is a scheme made by the Secretary of State to facilitate the decommissioning of firearms, ammunition and explosives in Northern Ireland. The decommissioning scheme will be administrative in nature, allowing for simplicity of wording so that everyone involved in the decommissioning process is entirely clear as to what is required in order to act in accordance with the scheme.

That approach has the benefit of flexibility. It maximises our ability to make, amend, withdraw or replace a scheme with the minimum possible delay in the light of the situation on the ground, as it may develop.

Clause 2 requires that the amnesty period during which firearms, ammunition and explosives may be dealt with in accordance with a decommissioning scheme, must be identified in the scheme. It also deals with its duration, in the first instance providing that it shall expire one year after the date when the Act is passed, but conferring power to extend the maximum duration for periods of up to 12 months, subject to express parliamentary approval, up to a maximum of five years from the date when the Act is passed.

Clause 3 requires a decommissioning scheme to make provision for one or more specified ways of dealing with firearms, ammunition and explosives, while allowing the scheme to make provision also for others. The ways specified in clause 3 reflect the decommissioning methods identified in Mitchell's report.

Clause 4 and the schedule give effect to Mitchell's recommendation that

"the decommissioning process should not expose individuals to prosecution".

It provides for an amnesty from prosecution for those who commit offences specified in the schedule, but only by virtue of anything that they do when acting in accordance with a decommissioning scheme.

Clause 5 limits the use in evidence of information obtained as a result of a decommissioning scheme, and gives effect to paragraph 48 of the Mitchell report in this respect. It provides that, in criminal proceedings, a decommissioned article shall not be admissible in evidence, nor shall evidence be admissible of information derived from it, or of anything done in accordance with a decommissioning scheme, or of any information derived therefrom. The restriction does not apply, of course, to proceedings for any offence alleged to have been committed with an article that had already been decommissioned at the time that the offence was committed, nor to evidence sought to be adduced on behalf of the accused.

Clause 6 gives effect to the forensic testing recommendation of Mitchell. It prohibits certain tests and procedures in relation to decommissioned articles. But tests and procedures for safety and verification purposes are excluded from the prohibition, and so are tests or procedures in connection with the investigation of any offence alleged to have been committed after an article has been decommissioned.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The effect of clauses 5 and 6, but especially clause 6, is presumably to permit someone who has committed an offence with a weapon to dispose of the weapon from an evidential point of view by putting it into the decommissioning system. Whereas one might see justification for that in the overall objective—that is what an amnesty requires in order to be effective—is the amnesty permanent, or when the five-year period is up, if there is a return to violence, will it then be possible to re-examine the weapon to see whether it can assist in clearing up crimes that have been committed?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. The scheme is self-contained and its purpose is as expressed. It will last for five years. It will not be possible retrospectively to take advantage of whatever evidence might be available after the expiry of the scheme. That is my understanding; in case there is anything to add to my answer, I shall ask the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), to deal with it in winding up.

The right hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that the purpose is to enable someone who commits a possessory offence at the very least, by reason of his possession of an illegally held weapon, to come forward and to deal with it in one of the four ways specified in the Bill, without the risk of being prosecuted for the offence of possession, of which he would give evidence by virtue of coming along to the relevant place to take advantage of the scheme.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): Will the Secretary of State confirm that in the case of a person who has committed a crime with a weapon that has been decommissioned, although any evidence culled from an examination of that weapon would be inadmissible, it would not debar the same person from being prosecuted on the basis of other evidence, such as eye witnesses to the commission of the crime?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am happy to confirm that the hon. and learned Gentleman's understanding is correct. The sole purpose of the amnesty provided for in the Bill is to prevent the technical offence of possession from being prosecuted, arising as it does by the action that is taken in accordance with the scheme. As a simple illustration, if there is a place at which articles must be dumped, someone who comes along carrying a pound of Semtex is not to be prosecuted by virtue solely of having had it in his possession at that time.

Mr. Beith: I am sorry to press the Secretary of State, but I think he may be understating the effect, justified though it may be. The forensic provisions prevent any examination of the weapon from which it might be established that it had been used in a succession of crimes. A great deal of Royal Ulster Constabulary time could be wasted in trying to clear up those crimes, in the absence of that evidence.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: That, too, is correct.

Clause 8 makes provision for decommissioning schemes in respect of arms, ammunition and explosives in England and Wales, and Scotland. It provides power by order to provide that any scheme made by my right hon. Friends to facilitate the decommissioning of firearms, ammunition and explosives, whether in England and Wales or in Scotland, and which includes provisions satisfying the requirements of clauses 2 and 3, shall be a decommissioning scheme for the purposes of the Bill, provided that it is also made for purposes relating to the affairs of Northern Ireland.

I have introduced that into the Bill in order to meet the understandable sensitivity of those who saw an entirely unintended possibility that somehow it was considered less important to bring people to justice in Northern Ireland than in England and Wales or in Scotland.

Such an order may substitute for any offence under the law of Northern Ireland set out in the schedule to the Bill a similar offence under the law of England and Wales, or Scotland.

[Sir Patrick Mayhew]

That gives my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland the power to secure the decommissioning of arms, ammunition and explosives in England and Wales and in Scotland if, in the light of progress with all-party talks and with the preparation of the Northern Ireland decommissioning scheme, such schemes prove to be desirable. As with a Northern Ireland scheme, it provides that a decommissioning scheme established for this important purpose shall not be capable of being used as an amnesty by those possessing illegal arms who are not genuinely involved with the decommissioning process. I understand that the chief constables in England and Wales and in Scotland are content with those arrangements.

Clause 9 provides for the expenses incurred in connection with a decommissioning scheme or in connection with the commission. Clause 10 is a defining clause and clause 11 contains the short title and makes clear that, apart from the Bill's provisions, the institution or conduct of criminal proceedings is unaffected.

I conclude with the following submissions to the House. In the context of Northern Ireland's affairs, the Government, in common with the vast majority of people in these islands, wish fervently to see an end to the illegal possession of arms. That would represent a very considerable step forward and we shall continue to do all in our power to assist such progress. What we shall not do is renege on the principles that have guided us by obscuring the hard, unpleasant but incontrovertible realities that lie at the root of continuing terrorist violence. We have heard Sinn Fein proclaim its desire for peace during the ceasefire and since its collapse. At the same time, the Provisional IRA has cast its grim shadow over the people's hopes, through its disgustingly callous actions. The first ceasefire has proved to be, in the words of Mr. Bruton, "a deception".

Each successive terrorist attack serves only to reaffirm the urgent need to dispose of the instruments of such destruction. Bombs and guns do not just devastate lives: they destroy hard-won trust and entrench bitterness between those charged with the already formidable responsibility of finding a way forward. The Mitchell report has provided a template by which agreement on the means of decommissioning arms can be achieved. The Government hope that the political parties will arrive at such agreement as soon as possible and join in putting the report's recommendations into practice. Meanwhile, the Bill is a necessary and timely piece of preparation and I commend it to the House.

3.51 pm

Ms Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): The Labour party welcomes the introduction of the Bill and echoes the Secretary of State's comments complimenting the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Garda Siochana on their record of finds so far—that has clearly helped the process in the past few months.

As we made clear previously, we shall facilitate the Bill's speedy passage through the House. We welcome the fact that the normal procedures of the House are being employed for the Bill and that the usual Committee stage procedures will be followed. In the past—for example, with the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc.) Bill in April and May—we have supported the use of exceptional procedures to put new legislation swiftly on to the statute book. However, our co-operation on such pressing occasions should not be mistaken for a general willingness to override the conventions of the House. Exceptional procedures should apply in exceptional circumstances. In this case, I am sure that the good will on both sides of the House in support of moving forward sensibly with the legislation will ensure its speedy passage.

The Bill has wider significance than the issue of decommissioning paramilitary weapons. It is also about working to create an environment where talks can take place and an agreement can be reached. It is a crucial measure that is designed to build confidence. No one can doubt that the provisions outlined in the Bill are needed desperately following the events of the summer—especially at Drumcree—and their aftermath. The anger and fear among the nationalist community after the rule of law was threatened and flouted at Portadown remains strong, as does the underlying fear and distrust of the Unionist community which was expressed at Drumcree.

There is a fear that giving ground on the marches issue is just the tip of the iceberg—a small part of a much larger process that is continually undermining the Unionist way of life. I understand those fears and, in that context, we welcome this confidence-building measure. We also draw the attention of the House to the other confidence-building measures highlighted in the Mitchell report to which the Secretary of State referred, such as the policing and prison issues. We believe that rapid progress on those issues would also help the process of building trust across the communities. Urgent action is needed, too, to reduce the growing fear and worry in many people's minds over prospects for Drumcree mark 3 next year.

Dr. Peter North and his two colleagues are due to report in January next year. I hope that the House will not mind if I take this opportunity to say that it is incumbent upon us all—Opposition, Government and Members from Northern Ireland—to do all that we can to respond positively to the recommendations of the North committee, and that we try to work together to ensure that we will not face Drumcree mark 3 in 1997.

Decommissioning is an important area for confidence building. It has, as has been seen so far, proved a very demanding and difficult one. It is the baseline of any peace process. It is both an issue of confidence as negotiations progress and an objective in itself—in this case, as is often said, it is to take the gun out of Irish politics for good. But still, as we approach Christmas, people here in England—and even more so in Northern Ireland—will have on their minds as they shop for presents, "Will a bomb go off today?"

The Bill can help take us down the road of decommissioning weapons. For the vast majority of people, it can begin the process of providing security. For the paramilitaries, too, it can offer a path out of their history of violence, terror, murder and mayhem. The question for us today is whether they will have the courage to take it. Will the IRA have the courage to call a ceasefire that is clear and unequivocal; that will end the violence for good; and this time to show by their actions that they mean it; a ceasefire—contrary to newspaper

reports today—that holds before, during and after Christmas? We want nothing less than an end to violence for good.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I fully endorse what my hon. Friend said about the need for a ceasefire, and in the mean time I hope that the security authorities are fully alert to any possible IRA devices, be they in Northern Ireland or on the mainland. When my hon. Friend speaks about confidence building, will she express concern about Loyalist intimidation in Ballymena, where people going about their legitimate business of going to church are being intimidated? Should not we congratulate the Unionist mayor, who has gone out of his way to condemn the intimidation and, moreover, to show his solidarity with Catholics by standing outside the church as they go in?

Ms Mowlam: I echo my hon. Friend's comments in relation to what we saw at Harryville not just over the past weeks but at the weekend. It is an example of vicious sectarianism, which does not reflect well on the community from which these people come. Let us make it clear, as my hon. Friend did, that what is happening at Harryville does not represent the views and beliefs of the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland. As my hon. Friend said, the courage of Councillor James Curry, mayor of Ballymena, should be acknowledged in the House, and we should support the actions that Ballymena council took. For the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland, such sectarianism is not part of their beliefs or views in any way.

Decommissioning is a central part of the peace process. Let us go back to the ceasefires of August and October 1994, when decommissioning was not high on the political agenda. Then in 1995, we all enjoyed the peace, and a gesture on decommissioning—as a small but essential act of good faith—was both desirable and thought possible. It became clear, however, that such a step was not one that paramilitaries on either side were willing to take. The absence of a small step began a process of retreat on all sides. If such a step was not possible, the argument went, how could Sinn Fein be trusted over their commitment to the peace process? To many people, it was just plain logic. If someone is committed to peace, the disposal of a few pounds of Semtex or a cache of rifles was not an impossible step to take. A stand-off was all that was achieved as trust and confidence declined. Sinn Fein's failure to agree with all the other parties at the Dublin forum on the importance of consent reinforced anxieties that the IRA was not serious, and that the ceasefire was merely tactical.

As the Secretary of State said, a resolution of the issue was sought by the two Governments through the establishment, in November last year, of the international body. In its report, the international body took a pragmatic view on decommissioning. It said that the paramilitaries were unwilling to start to decommission before talks began, and that it was unacceptable to wait for decommissioning until the end of talks. Therefore, a compromise had to be struck. The compromise that it suggested was that

"as progress is made on political issues, even modest mutual steps on decommissioning could help create the atmosphere needed for further steps in a progressive pattern of mounting trust and confidence."

Or, in the words of the Prime Minister, parallel decommissioning.

Then we had Canary wharf. Instead of mounting trust and confidence, we have seen this year a painful deterioration of the peace process. Politicians followed what they believed was the best way forward, but there is now little trust and no confidence. As my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said, the events at Harryville at the weekend and previously epitomise that deterioration.

Given the weekend's events, it is sad to reflect on what we were doing a year ago. We had the successful visit of President Clinton, and were looking forward to a peaceful Christmas and the Mitchell report. We were talking about decommissioning then, and we are still talking about it now. Sadly, some people are now saying, "Why focus on discussing decommissioning in the talks process, when the people who speak for those with weapons are not all represented." That is to say that the present talks process can move forward on this issue only with the participation of Sinn Fein.

At the same time, others hold the view that the decommissioning of weapons must begin before Sinn Fein can come into the talks with other parties—in short, Washington 3. The Mitchell report is realistic, and makes it clear that that will not happen. Why, then, are we in danger of going back into that political cul-de-sac two years on?

Mr. Robert McCartney: Is the hon. Lady aware that the difference between last year and the events that have taken place since February this year make the basis of the Mitchell report irrelevant? As she well knows, the Mitchell report was based on a belief in the bona fides of Sinn Fein-IRA and in their good intentions about decommissioning, whereas the whole world knows that, at that time and since, they have been preparing for a further onslaught. Furthermore, the Mitchell report was based on a ceasefire that had held for 18 months—that was a valuable constituent part of its assessment. There is no longer a ceasefire.

Ms Mowlam: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the situation is qualitatively and quantitatively different from a year ago. I put it to him that however the talks process develops with regard to decommissioning and the achievement of another ceasefire, we have a chance of taking violence off the streets not just in Northern Ireland, but throughout Britain. To do that, we must—perhaps not in the same way—deal with issues similar to those that we were dealing with a year ago. Of course the context has changed—we have only to consider Canary wharf, Manchester and Thiepval to know exactly what has happened—but if we are to move the process forward in the months or years ahead, the same issues must be addressed in some shape or form. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that there was then a ceasefire and now there is not.

Decommissioning must be addressed at some point in the talks process, and the best time is when a ceasefire is on the table. We should welcome the fact that some people are considering how to deal with decommissioning both before and after a ceasefire. That is a positive step. I hope that the House agrees that we should consider the work of Senator Mitchell, John de Chastelain and

[Ms Mowlam]

Hari Holkeri to overcome the present impasse, with or without a ceasefire. We must deal with the problem of a ceasefire at some point.

I shall deal with some specific aspects of the Bill, whose purpose is to facilitate decommissioning, and ask the Secretary of State for clarification. He said that clause 1 dealt with decommissioning schemes. Clause 1(b) suggests that provisions other than those in the Bill could be made for such schemes. The Secretary of State said that the aim was to retain flexibility in the process, and I understand the thoughts behind that, but it would be helpful to hear some examples of what he has in mind. He also told us that clause 4(2) gave him power to add offences to, or remove them from, the list in the schedule. Will he give an assurance—as I think he did in reply to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith)—that, in circumstances in which "any offence" is affected, the provision will not apply retrospectively?

Will the Secretary of State give some specific instances relating to clauses 5(4) and 6(3)(a), in which an offence might be committed by use of an article that had already been decommissioned? He spoke of limits and used the term "self-contained", but one or two examples would help us to understand exactly what is referred to in those clauses.

The Secretary of State said, when discussing clause 8, that the scheme would apply in parallel in Scotland, Wales and England. Can he reassure us that the schemes in those countries will be identical to the one being introduced in Northern Ireland? He said that they would be similar, but we want to be told that they will be exactly the same.

The Labour party has consistently maintained that the principles of consent, increasing co-operation across the island of Ireland, fair treatment and respect for both traditions should be at the heart of the search for peace in Northern Ireland. We have maintained that the most progress is made when the two Governments work closely together, and the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Downing street declaration and the framework documents are proof of that. We hope that, following today's meeting, the two Governments will continue to work closely together.

The two Prime Ministers should spare no effort in their attempts to overcome the current differences between them—differences which, we believe, are not matters of principle. It is in all our interests for the IRA to call an unequivocal ceasefire, and for Sinn Fein to commit itself, in word and deed, to the path of peace and democracy. There are differences relating to process and practice, but we hope that, with good will and determination, a resolution can be found.

We hope that the Government will maintain the determination that they have shown before to take the extra steps that are necessary to move the process forward. We know that their position in the House is not one in which any Government would like to be, and it is especially difficult for a Government who are trying to steward a process of delicate negotiations in which other parties in the House are involved. It is merely a statement of fact to say that the interests of any peace process are better served by a strong and stable Government than by a weak one. That is precisely why Opposition Members have supported the Government in their efforts to bring a lasting peace to Northern Ireland, and we will continue to do so by supporting the Bill today.

4.8 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I listened to the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) with great interest. I do not substantially or significantly disagree with anything that she said, with one exception. That relates to what was said by the hon. Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney). I personally support the argument, which he briefly summarised, that the foundation of the Mitchell report is most substantially undermined by the fact that it was formulated on the understanding that Sinn Fein-IRA was genuinely committed to a peaceful solution.

We know that Mitchell was wrong in drawing that conclusion at the time, although the evidence, of course, was not immediately available. In that sense, his entire report is established on a misunderstanding. Greater significance should be given to that in our wider consideration of the process, and of the point that we have reached.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the Mitchell report's basic principles were reiterated in the joint communiqué of 28 February issued by the two sovereign Governments; that they quoted from Mitchell's two basic principles long after the ceasefire had been broken and long after that period of peace had ended; and that, in effect, when it was announced in the House, the joint communiqué was supported by the hon. Gentleman, who is now finding fault with it?

Mr. Hunter: The hon. Gentleman is reading too much into my observation. Of course I stand by the position adopted by the Government in February and to which I have referred many times, as have other hon. Members. I was merely supporting the point made by the hon. Member for South Down, who said that, in that one respect, Mitchell was demonstrably wrong; but I certainly stand by the report's wider context, and it is essential that we build on it in the negotiations that are taking place. I hope that that at least partially reassures the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Mallon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hunter: I ask the hon. Gentleman to forgive me, but I will not give way again on the subject. Let us advance.

The decommissioning of illegally held weapons is central to the Government's policy on Northern Ireland, and the Bill is self-evidently central to implementing the Government's policy on decommissioning. As the explanatory memorandum states, the Bill gives expression to the

"guidelines on the modalities of decommissioning contained in the Report of the International Body."

It is profitable, however, to view the Bill in the wider context of the process as a whole, as did the hon. Member for Redcar and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The entire policy was launched with the Downing street declaration, the third anniversary of which is in sight. The greater part of the declaration still stands as the guiding principles that should determine the way forward. The declaration extolled the virtue of

"an agreed framework for peace"

In that declaration, both Governments committed themselves to seeking

"peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement",

and undertook

"to encourage, facilitate and enable such agreement."

The declaration also made it clear that the principle of non-violence lay at the heart of the envisaged process. In paragraph 10, both Governments confirmed that only

"democratically mandated parties that establish a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and have shown that they abide by the democratic process, are free to participate fully in democratic politics."

The Government have consistently argued that, if an organisation is truly committed to exclusively peaceful methods, it no longer has any need for weapons and explosives, and that a commitment to decommissioning is a logical expression of a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods. I have supported that position to the best of my ability.

As we all know, the decommissioning issue has arguably caused more dissent, ill-feeling and rancour between the participants in the process and between commentators on the process than any other single issue. There should never have been any misunderstanding about the Government's position on decommissioning, either before or after the international body's report. On many occasions, my right hon. and learned Friend summarised the position that the Government held on decommissioning until the early part of this year, which was most succinctly expressed in the so-called "Washington principles".

Hon. Members will recall the hostile reaction to that policy position, which was adopted by Irish nationalists, north and south, and by Republicans. It is worth recording, and right to recall in a debate on this Bill, that the Government were then accused—unjustly—of inserting preconditions that had not previously existed, of moving the goalposts, of changing rules after the contest had started, and of much else. The same accusations are being made today.

Hon. Members may recall that, in June 1995, Mr. Adams, in an interview with *The Irish Times*, stated:

"the demand for the surrender of IRA weapons as a precondition to negotiations by the British Government was never mentioned before August 31st, 1994."

Many others echoed that point; and, today, they are re-editing the same theme in their accusations.

The record should clearly contain the fact that, two months before the Downing street declaration, in a radio programme broadcast by Radio Telefis Eireann, my right hon. and learned Friend stated that the British position included prior decommissioning. I have a transcript of the relevant section, and recordings of the broadcast are available from RTE.

On the same day as the Downing street declaration was published—in *Dail Debates*, volume 437, column 776—the Irish Foreign Minister acknowledged:

"Questions were raised on how to determine a permanent cessation of violence. We are talking about the handing up of weapons."

The most graphic demonstration—to eliminate any shadow of doubt—that Mr. Adams himself knew the Government's position was that he condemned it publicly. In *The Irish Times*, of 8 January 1994—less than a month after the Downing street declaration, and 18 months before he claimed that the British Government had made up a new policy—Mr. Adams personally wrote:

"Mr. Mayhew goes on to say, 'Well, the exploratory dialogue will be so that we can discuss with Sinn Fein how the IRA will hand over its weapons.

"So, I say to myself, 'This is what they want. They want the IRA to stop so that Sinn Fein can have the privilege, 12 weeks later, having been properly sanitised and come out of quarantine, to have discussions with senior civil servants on how the IRA can hand over their weapons."

Decommissioning must begin before the start of substantive dialogue—the Government said it, and the Irish Government said it. Mr. Adams knew the score, and he condemned it.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, in addition to the parliamentary brief, Prof. Paul Bew has set out, in extenso, all the occasions on which Adams and representatives of the Irish Government acknowledged in publications and in statements in the Dail, on RTE and in other media that decommissioning was a necessary and integral part of any peace process?

Mr. Hunter: I am aware of that work, and I corresponded with Prof. Bew about it more than once. I readily confess that I borrowed frequently from his research.

In the course of time, the Government's policy changed, from an insistence on prior decommissioning to not merely considering but implementing Mitchell's suggestion that decommissioning might take place in parallel with talks. The merits or otherwise of the policy change were argued, and can still be argued, at very great length. However, the fact remains that decommissioning in parallel with talks—Mitchell's compromise to end the impasse—is the Government's position, which is one from which no Government should retreat.

One understands that the Government are under pressure from the Irish Government—which is reflecting and expressing the opinion of virtually all nationalist politicians, north and south, and of the Sinn Fein political leadership, that further concessions should be made and a fast-track route to negotiations offered to Sinn Fein.

The Government, in the judgment of many of my colleagues—it is a judgment I share—should stand firm in their insistence on Mitchell's decommissioning in parallel. They should also stand by the policy position which the two Governments jointly adopted in the aftermath of the Mitchell report—the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) referred to it. For the Provisionals to be readmitted to the process, there must be an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire, and the Provisionals, over a period that cannot be specified in advance, must establish their unequivocal commitment to peaceful means.

To put it another way, and to reflect wording that I have heard the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) use, the genuineness of a future Provisional ceasefire

[Mr. Hunter]

should be judged by the quality of the Provisionals' words and deeds, not just by the passing of a predetermined number of weeks or months.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): Does it not follow that that period could therefore be very short if we were to consider the quality of words and deeds? If there is an end to punishment beatings and to people being placed in exile, if the whereabouts of the bodies of the disappeared is explained, and if there are signs that Sinn Fein-IRA is moving quickly, there could be three simple steps and an open door into the talks provided in the Prime Minister's recent statement.

Mr. Hunter: If we were to indulge in a game of make-believe and think of various responses on the ground, I entirely agree that it is theoretically possible that the genuineness of a commitment to a ceasefire could be established in a relatively short time, but I will not be drawn too far down that path. The hon. Gentleman is seeking to reverse the principle that I outlined. What matters is the quality of the words and deeds that follow a ceasefire, not the quantity of a passage of time.

Mr. McNamara: That is a point worth pursuing. The hon. Gentleman is arguing the Government's case. If we are looking at the quality of actions after a ceasefire has been declared, why can we not at the same time give a date and say that, by that date, we shall have judged the quality of what has been offered from the declaration of the ceasefire to that date?

Mr. Hunter: I will not pursue that line too far. Certainly, as the hon. Gentleman says, I am adopting a position in support of the Government. I believe that the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), will be winding up the debate. Clearly, he is far better qualified than I, but my short answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that, once we impose the artificial factor of a date, we shall be complicating and compounding the issue, not coming up with a simple solution.

I was referring to the need for the Provisionals to establish a genuine commitment to exclusively peaceful means over a period that cannot be specified, and I was expressing the opinion that a change in Government policy would be undesirable. Indeed, it would be more than that—it would be disastrous. I believe that it would be received very badly by many hon. Members of all parties, and rightly so. I do not believe that any Unionist of honour and calibre could or would remain at the talks in such circumstances—as the Provisionals walked into the negotiations through one door, every self-respecting Unionist would walk out through another.

Above all, the Provisionals would see such a concession by the Government as further evidence that eventually British Governments always give way to force or the threat of force. That would be their perception, and it would merely encourage them to remain intransigent, and to continue their ballot box and Armalite tactics.

The modalities of decommissioning outlined by Mitchell in the report emerged from his dialogue with the two Governments and the parties. I have no reason to doubt that they reflect a consensus of opinion that was put to him.

I am concerned about only one aspect of the Bill. I accept the principle of amnesty from prosecution for people who handle weapons or explosives in the process of the decommissioning scheme. However, I am concerned about banning detective work on those weapons once they are in the possession of the authorities.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary will have spent a great deal of time trying to bring to justice the perpetrators of some horrific crimes, and I hope that it will continue to do so. It seems strange that a possible source of evidence, intelligence or information in the possession of the authorities as a result of decommissioning should not be available to the RUC. Perhaps I am missing the point. No doubt it will be forcefully explained to me in due course. I accept the principle of amnesty from prosecution for individuals handling weapons and explosives in the course of implementing the scheme, but I find it hard to accept that no further work should be done on those weapons.

Apart from that point, I accept and support the Bill. However, my overriding reaction—this does not detract from or otherwise qualify my support for the Government and for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State—is that the Bill is unlikely to play a part in transforming the politics of Northern Ireland; nor will it feature in the long-awaited solution to the Irish question.

I suspect that, at some time—perhaps in the not too distant future—Sinn Fein will announce a second ceasefire, but my understanding is that the Provisionals are not remotely interested in anything other than the remorseless advance of their political objectives. A future ceasefire would be purely tactical, just as the previous one was. There is no evidence that the provisional republican movement is preparing for anything other than a continuation of its Armalite and ballot box strategy. I hope that events will prove me wrong, but I fear that the provisionals are exploiting the good intentions of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), and taking him for a ride.

4.27 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): On behalf of some of my hon. Friends, I apologise to you, Madam Speaker, and to the Secretary of State for their absence at the moment. Unfortunately, travel from Northern Ireland has been inhibited by the familiar problems with air traffic control. The flights this morning were running one and a half or two hours late. I should not be surprised if some of my colleagues who were hoping to take part in the debate arrived in the next half hour. I trust that they will be given some indulgence for their failure to be here at the beginning.

In broad terms—very broad terms, subject to reservations that I shall mention later—I welcome the fact that the Bill is being introduced and debated. The hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) referred to the situation in Northern Ireland a year ago. As she pointed out, President Clinton had just visited Belfast. It was a time of a significant outpouring of feeling, with people demonstrating their welcome to him and to the fact that Northern Ireland had been at peace for some time. They endorsed that peace, and wanted it to continue. They were also looking forward to Christmas.

A year ago, however, we did not know that Sinn Fein-IRA had already decided to resume violence. Furthermore, the decision had been taken even before President Clinton arrived in Northern Ireland. As he

toured Northern Ireland and we celebrated the peace that then existed, construction of the bomb that exploded on 9 February in Canary wharf had already started, and the organisation had committed itself to the resumption of violence.

Nor, in retrospect, should we have been surprised by that decision. Let us cast our minds back to September 1995, when the British Government were endeavouring to persuade the Irish Government to support the creation of what became known as the Mitchell commission, the international body on the decommissioning of weapons, and the notorious meeting in west Belfast attended by Martin McGuiness and Gerry Adams and two senior Irish civil servants—the Secretary to the Cabinet, Paddy Teahon, and a senior civil servant in the Department of Foréign Affairs, Sean o'hUiginn—when the Irish civil servants were told that, if the Irish Government endorsed and participated in the British Government's proposals to establish a commission on the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, the ceasefire would be over and there would be bodies in the street.

I should say in fairness that the threat was not uttered by Gerry Adams, but by a fifth person present at the meeting. However, I see no reason to doubt that the words accurately represented the views expressed by Adams and McGuiness, although in a somewhat stark form.

Towards the end of November, as it became clear that the decommissioning commission was about to get under way, the decision was taken to end the ceasefire in circumstances that resulted in bodies in the streets. We should not be surprised by that, because the establishment of the international commission on decommissioning, with all its imperfections, was a clear signal to Sinn Fein-IRA that decommissioning was being treated seriously and would not be brushed aside.

A year ago, it was clear that the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, with all the difficulties involved, was being taken seriously, and that the Government would not consent to some arrangement whereby the issue was kicked into the long grass and forgotten. I trust that that continues to be the position of the Government and any future Government.

Decommissioning must be treated seriously, as it affects issues of confidence. If it is not treated seriously, the communities in Northern Ireland will not have confidence in the peace process. Therefore, it affects the validity of the process itself.

Some have asked us why we worry so much about it, as weapons—even those decommissioned as part of the beginning of a process—can always be replaced, and parties can make a commitment to peaceful means and then abandon it and return to violence as Sinn Fein-IRA did last year. However, we treat the issue of decommissioning as a litmus test of their intentions. Of course we want those intentions to be stated in clear words, but in view of the organisations involved, words alone are not sufficient, but must be reinforced by action. Although a variety of actions may be relevant, decommissioning would be an extremely good litmus test of their good intentions.

The United Kingdom, for all its imperfections, is a democracy that substantially extends to Northern Ireland. As a democracy, we cannot give legitimacy to terrorism or the use of violence, so, in the words of the Downing street declaration, we have to insist that organisations that have been involved in violence commit themselves to peaceful means, and show a willingness to abide by the democratic process. The hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) quoted the relevant paragraph of the Downing street declaration, which is still valid and which must remain the foundation of policy and of the approach to the problem.

As hon. Members have pointed out, the report of Mitchell commission, which came in January 1995, has to some extent been undermined by events. The report was based on an assessment of the intentions of paramilitary organisations which has since turned out to be optimistic.

The assessment reflected Mitchell's belief that there was a willingness on the part of paramilitary organisations to work towards the decommissioning of their weapons. As a result, when considering the ideas and proposals that Mitchell put forward, we must do so against the background that his assessment of paramilitary organisations' intentions was optimistic. We must not reproduce that optimistic assessment. In view of all that has happened over the past year, a healthy dose of scepticism—if I can use that word without causing fear among Conservative Members—is necessary in our approach to this matter.

Indeed, in view of the events of the past year, I echo the comment made towards the end of his speech by the hon. Member for Basingstoke—one senses some unreality when considering the Bill, because one has difficulty believing that decommissioning along the lines it envisages will actually occur. To illustrate at least some hon. Members' sense of unreality about the process, one has only to call as witness the acres of empty Benches currently surrounding us. Other hon. Members evidently do not regard decommissioning as a serious prospect. None the less, it is important that the Bill be considered and enacted.

In the report of the international body called the Mitchell commission, it was proposed—rightly so—that there should be an international verification commission in respect of decommissioning. That central concept is important: if decommissioning is to occur, we have to ensure that it is carried out properly, and that it does indeed occur.

Most of the terrorist weapons and munitions held on behalf of Sinn Fein-IRA are not in the United Kingdom—there are some in Northern Ireland and some in England, and there might even be some on the continent, but most are in the Irish Republic. Indeed, it is no secret that most of those in the Irish Republic are in the south, in the area stretching between Limerick and Cork.

The stores in that area were constructed to hide the large quantities of munitions that Sinn Fein-IRA obtained from Gaddafi's Libya, and most of that consignment of weaponry is still there. If decommissioning is to take place in respect of republican organisations' weaponry, most of the decommissioning will therefore take place in the Republic of Ireland. Against that background, it is necessary that we have an international verification commission so that we can be certain that such decommissioning is taking place on a proper basis.

To make that point absolutely clear, let me state that we would not be satisfied with reliance on the words or statements of the Irish Government or its servants or agents in respect of decommissioning—we could not rely

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on assurances emanating from such sources. In order to be sure that decommissioning takes place within the Republic of Ireland, it is crucial that we have independent verification that it is taking place: an international commission would provide that verification, independent of terrorist organisations and independent of the Government of the state in which such decommissioning takes place. Of course, the relevant Government will have an input, and there will be a variety of people on the commission or serving it, but the commission must have the character of independence, so as to enable us to be sure.

There will be reservations about the fact that we do not have the detail in the legislation on that point to be sure that the commission will have the requisite quality of independence. Nor do we have sufficient detail in the legislation to be sure that the international verification commission will be able to conduct its work, because to do so it will require information. It will have to be able to acquire information, and it will have to be able to move on the premises under which it operates. It must be able to go where it wants and to see what it wants to see.

One of our concerns is whether, if the commission were entirely dependent on the grace and favour of the Government of the country in which it was operating, we could be sure that it could acquire the necessary information and have the necessary capacity to conduct its inquiries, or to go where it wants to go and to see what it needs to see. The legislation, because of its framework character, does not give us the information to be sure on those points. Perhaps the points will be contained in the decommissioning scheme. I would welcome whatever information the Government can give us on that point.

I am concerned especially because there is to be no statutory basis, as such, for the commission. It is clear from the legislation that the commission will be created as a result of an agreement with the Irish Republic under royal prerogative. I am concerned that the use of the royal prerogative to establish the commission may mean that the commission will not have the powers it needs. Perhaps it is intended to contain those powers within the decommissioning schemes, but we should be given some indication of that during the debate. I would welcome whatever the Minister has to say on that point.

I had not intended to cover the technicalities just yet, but there are other general observations to be made about the legislation. Mitchell reported in January; consequently, it was in January that Mitchell pointed out the need for an independent international verification commission, and also made the point that that commission would need to have a legal basis in both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

We accept that central point. The point was made in January, and we are now in December. We have had more than 10 months of delay. It was immediately clear, on the publication of the Mitchell report at the end of January, that it would be necessary to bring forward legislation, and I and my colleagues made that point in January and February. Indeed, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) and I, together with the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), spoke to the Irish Government on that point on 11 March, we reinforced the need to bring forward legislation on that point.

We were given to understand, on 11 March by the Irish Government, that steps would be taken on the necessary legislation in advance of the elections in Northern Ireland. Those elections took place on 30 May. The Irish Government did not give us an undertaking that the legislation would be on the statute book and fully operational by then, but they did say that, before 30 May, we would see that the matter was being dealt with. That date came and no action had been taken.

I note that the Secretary of State said today that the Irish Government intend to introduce the necessary legislation very soon. We had discussions with the Irish Government on that point in September—I have to acknowledge that they showed us a draft Bill, which was not that dissimilar from the Bill in front of us—and assured us that the legislation would be on the statute book before Christmas. I suppose that there is still a bit of time to go before Christmas, and that the Irish Government could rush the legislation through. I am not sure when the Irish Parliament rises for its Christmas recess, but I doubt whether the legislation will be on the statute book before Christmas.

I refer to those matters to make the point that, in March and in September, we received assurances from the Irish Government on the necessary legislation as evidence of their good faith. The assurances given in March were not honoured, and the assurances given in September have not been honoured.

Conclusions can be drawn from that about the seriousness with which the Irish Government are committed to decommissioning and to the talks. The failure of the Irish Government to honour their assurances on those matters raises serious questions in Northern Ireland about whether they are committed to the process or whether they are going through the motions. Those are serious issues, which the Irish Government have to address, and I am sorry to say that their conduct so far does not give us any reassurance.

The whole process of decommissioning depends on whether those involved in terrorist operations in Northern Ireland are willing to commit themselves to peaceful means and to proceed along the path indicated in the legislation. There are several terrorist organisations in Northern Ireland. Most of my comments so far have been directed towards Sinn Fein-IRA, but it is appropriate also to notice the existence of other terrorist organisations—the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force. Unlike Sinn Fein-IRA, those organisations have sustained their ceasefire, and we should recognise that they have done so despite considerable provocation.

We expect, of course, that that ceasefire will be maintained. There is no justification for the resumption of violence, and we trust that that will not happen. We re-echo the many appeals that we have made to the leadership of those organisations to sustain their ceasefire. We note also that those organisations have indicated a willingness to decommission their weapons in parallel with Sinn Fein-IRA. That is consistent with the reference in the Mitchell report to mutual decommissioning.

We trust that the commitments that have been made by the political representatives of those paramilitary organisations to decommissioning alongside Sinn Fein-IRA, when the time comes, will be remembered and adhered to. In a sense, the political representatives of those organisations have delivered post-dated cheques to

the rest of us, which will have to be called upon when the time comes. The time will come when a Sinn Fein ceasefire is also in place and what is now an academic issue will have to be put into practice.

I see no advantage in insisting that other paramilitary organisations should commence decommissioning in advance of Sinn Fein-IRA, generally desirable though that might be. I see no point in pressing the matter when that might bring about the end of the ceasefires that are now in existence. While those organisations—the UDA and the UVF—have to make a commitment to decommissioning, and have to be prepared to implement it when the time comes, we must be realistic about the present situation.

The time will come—if it does—when there is a ceasefire by Sinn Fein, and that will also raise the question of its entry into the talks. That matter has been the subject of some comment recently, and it is important that we should touch on it in our debate.

We have said that the previous ceasefire was not a genuine one; we know that to be so, and we endorse the Prime Minister's comments at the weekend. We know now that work on the Canary wharf bomb was in hand a year ago, at the time of the presidential visit. We also know that, within a matter of weeks of the declaration of the ceasefire at the end of August 1994, Sinn Fein-IRA was taking steps to acquire safe houses and safe stores, and to put in place the stockpile of munitions that the police found in London a few months ago. We know that to have been the case, and we therefore know that the last ceasefire was not genuine. If there is a fresh ceasefire which raises the issue of entry into talks, and consequently decommissioning as proposed by the Bill, we need to know that it is genuine.

Some three weeks ago, President Clinton stated at a press conference held shortly after his re-election that there needed to be a "genuine cessation" of violence, and those words carry with them the notion of permanence. He went on to say that the parties needed to know that the killing would not begin again, either in Great Britain or in Northern Island. That underlines the need for permanence and for any ceasefire to be effective throughout the United Kingdom.

We are concerned that a ceasefire applicable only to Northern Ireland may be announced, and that there is an intention to continue violence in the rest of the United Kingdom. That will not be sufficient. Hon. Members must appreciate that the rest of the United Kingdom is perhaps under more threat than Northern Ireland from a continuing campaign by Sinn Fein-IRA.

There is a strong belief within Sinn Fein-IRA that major terrorist incidents on the mainland—specifically in London—have driven the Government into making political concessions, and will do so in the future. That is its belief, and although hon. Members may consider it to be ill founded, it exists. Until Sinn Fein-IRA is disabused of that belief, there is no prospect of it making a genuine attempt to commit itself to peaceful means. However, a good first step would be for members of Sinn Fein-IRA to use terms that suggest permanence, and which show that they have turned away from violence and are committing themselves to exclusively peaceful means and to the democratic process.

It is for Sinn Fein-IRA to find the words that carry conviction. As a general rule, we are reluctant to suggest the words that should or could be used, because they would be taken as the maximum statement, which then would be whittled away. Obviously, we need an indication that it is repudiating violence, and we need a commitment to the democratic process, but we also need something that Sinn Fein has so far failed to provide—an indication of its willingness to accept the principle of consent. Although those would be positive indicators, words in themselves will not suffice, because of the deception during the previous ceasefire.

Words must be matched by actions, and a range of actions can be undertaken. Again, I am reluctant to suggest any particular actions, as they could be seen as the maximum and could be whittled away. There are actions that suggest a genuine commitment to peaceful means and that a ceasefire is genuine, but equally there are actions that show that a ceasefire is not genuine.

For an example of the latter, we have only to point to the horrific paramilitary beatings that occurred in Northern Ireland last weekend. We can also point to the continuing social and economic terrorism in parts of Northern Ireland, and to the attacks on the identity and culture of the British people in Northern Ireland that are continuing on a wide scale.

One deprecates the reactions to those attacks, particularly when they take the form of the blockade of the Catholic church in Harryiville, Ballymena, which has been referred to tonight. I must state how proud we in the Ulster Unionist party are of the action taken by the Ulster Unionist mayor of Ballymena and by his councillors who turned out to support him and demonstrated their solidarity. Would that more people did the same, and would that that were done with regard to other analogous events—some of which have occurred quite close to Ballymena.

Far too many incidents that show the absence of a commitment to peaceful means are going on in Northern Ireland. As the Prime Minister said the other day, we need to see words, actions and circumstances that are consistent with a commitment to peaceful means and to the democratic process. It is not particularly desirable to define those too closely, nor is it desirable to be drawn into discussions on time frames. If there is a genuine commitment to peaceful means and to the democratic process, it will be pretty obvious.

Similarly, if there is only an ambiguous commitment and an attempt to re-run the insincere ceasefire of August 1994, it will also be apparent, and we should act accordingly. If, as is likely, there is no commitment to peaceful means and to the democratic process, the detailed provisions of the legislation will become somewhat academic. None the less, it is desirable that this legislation be on the statute book, so that the opportunity is there for the process to move forward if such a commitment is made.

There are some minor comments on the legislation that I wish to make, some of which I have foreshadowed—particularly with regard to the constitution and powers of the verification commission. These are important matters, but perhaps it is more appropriate that they be teased out in Committee. However, it is important to put down a marker for that issue.

We have concerns about the decommissioning schemes, as the legislation provides for schemes to operate for up to five years from the date of the legislation. There is an inconsistency here with the legislation under which the

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talks are taking place which was passed in the spring of this year and led to the elections on 30 May. That legislation provided for a talks process which, beginning on 30 May, lasted for one year and was extendable to two years; so it is envisaged that the talks process is to last for two years, but that the decommissioning process is to last for five years.

However, we are told that we are dealing with the concept of "parallel decommissioning". Something is out of sync, and I should be grateful for an explanation of this apparent inconsistency. I appreciate that this matter too is best pursued in Committee.

The Bill contains provision for a very limited amnesty, and it is important that hon. Members appreciate how limited that amnesty will be. Use of the word "amnesty" in the context of the terrorism within the British Isles during the past 25 years quite understandably gives rise to sensitivities. None of us wants to see an amnesty for the crimes that have been committed, and I understand that that is neither the Government's intention nor what is provided for in the Bill.

It is important that the community realises that this Bill does not offer any amnesty for terrorist crimes, and that the amnesty is there to facilitate the destruction, decommissioning or surrender of illegally held weapons and other munitions. There have been several weapons amnesties within the United Kingdom following particular incidents, and they have generally depended simply on the discretion not to prosecute. I can understand the need to provide a statutory basis on this occasion, but the amnesty will relate to the possession of illegally held weapons that have been decommissioned, and not to any terrorist crimes that have been committed.

Having accepted that a limited amnesty exists, I must express concern about the provisions on forensic testing. I very much agree with the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on this matter. He queried the Secretary of State, whose answer was most unsatisfactory. He merely acknowledged that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed was right; of course he was right, but what he was saying involved a significant criticism of the legislation, and that criticism was not answered.

I can understand the idea that some forensic material should not be admissible in court, but that should not prevent the carrying out of forensic tests to determine whether the weapon decommissioned has in fact been used in the course of terrorism. That is an even more significant point for any decommissioning scheme for Great Britain.

I understand the reluctance of some police forces in England and Wales to approve of decommissioning, because it could be used by criminals to get rid of hot weapons that have been used for what we in Northern Ireland call ordinary crime. That is undesirable, and a scheme should be applicable only to weapons held by or for the purposes of terrorist organisations. There should therefore be no objection to having a provision in the legislation for forensic tests. One could provide that such evidence would not be admissible in court, thus preserving the inducement to terrorist organisations to decommission, while still enabling us to verify that the right weapons are being decommissioned.

I welcome clause 8. It concerns a matter on which I have often pressed the Secretary of State and his colleagues, so I am glad that provision has been made. Were the clause not there, the legislation would send the wrong signals to the community in Northern Ireland, and could be interpreted by people on both sides of the fence as meaning that terrorist crimes there were not viewed as seriously as terrorist crimes in England and Wales.

However, I am disturbed by the way in which the Secretary of State introduced the provision. He said that the schemes would operate in England and Wales only if, in the light of progress with all-party talks, they proved to be desirable. Such schemes are desirable irrespective of whether there is progress, and I trust that such a scheme will go ahead in Northern Ireland regardless. I am concerned about the contingent nature of the reference to the schemes in England and Wales. I hope that the Minister of State will address that point when he winds up. We can deal with other points of detail in Committee.

The current inter-party talks have been dealing with these matters for some time, and at considerable length. As we said in our paper at the beginning of October, the issue of decommissioning should be dealt with satisfactorily. We see no reason for its having held up the talks for the past two or more months. We were not asking for everything to be concluded to our satisfaction, or for the legislation to be on the statute book and the commission in place, before moving on.

We regard it as important, however, for the legislation to be put on the statute book, and for the international verification commission to be set up as quickly as possible. In the interval before the commission's establishment, some of those who are likely to serve on it should commence work to deal with the issues.

We told the other parties in the talks at the beginning of October that, if we were given satisfactory assurances about the implementation of the legislation, the establishment of the commission and, crucially, the procedures that would apply if and when Sinn Fein entered the process, the talks could proceed to substantive issues. We regret the fact that our generous and reasonable position did not receive a sufficient response, especially from the Irish Government.

Mr. Mallon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Trimble: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I have spoken for long enough, and other Northern Ireland Members are waiting to speak, so I will ask him to follow up the point when he makes his speech.

The Irish Government's delay in introducing legislation, and their failure to implement the assurances that they gave us in March and August leave a serious question in our minds about their commitment. We remember the comment made by the close adviser of the Irish Foreign Minister, that the talks were not worth a penny candle. I am sorry to say that the attitude adopted by the Irish Government in the talks in the past two months clearly shows that they have no commitment to the process. That is bad from the point of view of reinforcing the democratic process, which, at the end of the day, is what we are all supposed to be about.

5.4 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I agree with the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) that we are talking about something that may not happen, but if it does happen, it will be important for us to have considered it extremely carefully.

No one could reasonably quarrel with the details of the Bill, which arise from the Mitchell committee's report. I accept the absolute need for clause 6 if the paramilitaries on either side are to have any confidence about the forensic testing of any weapons or other materials that might be surrendered. It is of the utmost importance that they should feel confident that the surrendering of such material will not be followed through in any way whatever.

That does not mean that those who have been involved in evil and criminal offences will not be prosecuted, nor that the proper authorities should not pursue their researches to try to bring such people to court. Nothing should be done—especially not in the way suggested by the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter)—that would in any way act as an inhibition on the proper surrendering of weapons.

Earlier, I interrupted the Secretary of State to ask him about the role of the international commission: whether it was to be a technical body, supervising the military capacity, the giving up of arms and their destruction, or whether it was at any time to be given a political role that could take over the proper function of Governments or of parties to the talks. I did not get as clear-cut an answer as I had hoped for.

It is important, in view of discussions and conversations that have been conducted in the past and of suggestions that have been made by members of parties, that at no time should any power of a political nature be given to the international commission dealing with the verification of the surrendering of arms. In particular, the commission should not take the political decision as to when it is right and proper to embark on a course of action: that should be the role of Governments and parties.

It must be underlined that the surrender of arms will not necessarily be to either of the sovereign Governments. We seek only the verification of the armaments' destruction. The paramilitaries will look to the commission for protection of their position, for verification that they have surrendered what they claim to have surrendered, and for an assurance that no pressure will be exerted on them to surrender their arms to Government representatives.

I believe that the people responsible for the breakdown in the ceasefire were no other than the IRA. They had no justification for breaking it. But the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister have been very sensitive to the criticism that they were dilatory in their approach to bringing Sinn Fein into the talks after the ceasefire was declared. I happen to believe that it was a mistake to start ratcheting up the hurdles over which Sinn Fein had to jump before it could enter the talks. That was, I believe, based on a misunderstanding of how the paramilitaries, especially the republican paramilitaries, viewed the situation.

The republican paramilitaries regarded themselves as having instigated a ceasefire. Furthermore, they regarded themselves as a legitimate army—which no Member of this House would accept. They believed that they began the ceasefire to facilitate the commencement of talks. In no way did they regard themselves as committed to the surrender of their arms or ammunition. Indeed, they found the idea that they should give up some arms tantamount to admitting that they were in the wrong and that they were being asked to surrender to superior force.

The Government did not appreciate this attitude; instead, by imposing conditions on Sinn Fein's entry to the talks, the Government made Sinn Fein feel humiliated. As much as anything else, that led to a breakdown of confidence, just as there had been such a breakdown on the other side.

Mr. Hunter: Will the hon. Gentleman deal with the point that I made? In January 1994, less than a month after the Downing street declaration and some eight months or more before the IRA ceasefire, Mr. Adams was perfectly well aware of the fact that the British Government were thinking in terms of prior decommissioning—indeed, he said as much in a newspaper interview on 8 January.

Mr. McNamara: I am quite prepared to accept that Mr. Adams knew that; whether he accepted it is an entirely different matter. I believe we should recognise that the opportunity was lost.

Today we are again losing an opportunity. For the life of me I cannot see why, if a ceasefire is declared, we cannot stipulate a date by when talks would commence. The hon. Member for Basingstoke said that that would complicate and compound the difficulties; but if we want not just a declaration of a ceasefire but demonstrable action to show that it is in operation there can surely be no problem about declaring such a date. Without it, we will return to the problem of the past: the Government will keep extending the time limit, and there will be pressures to do so in this House from certain parties, sometimes on other issues, which will force an extension of the deadline. That has already happened before—

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): I am curious as to whether the hon. Gentleman is prepared to detail to the House the measures that he believes the IRA and other terrorist organisations must take to convince him that they have given up on violence. Yesterday the Prime Minister made it perfectly plain that his attitude will be determined by the intelligence that he receives, not by the IRA's public pronouncements.

Mr. McNamara: If we are to depend on intelligence operations, the information from which is given to the Prime Minister so that he can make his decision, hon. Members will be unable to examine that information. We will be left with judging by what we learn from the media and by what we are told. As for the hon. Gentleman's request for a catalogue of items that would prove a cessation of violence, I do not think it would be right to go into that now—any more than the leader of the hon. Gentleman's party was prepared to do.

The Government must be prepared to recognise the extent of the shock created by what happened at Drumcree, and the effect that it had not just on the nationalist community in Northern Ireland but on the rest of the United Kingdom. It was seen that the rule of law was flouted; in the face of a threatened mass mobilisation the police changed their minds. There are some on the

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republican side who ask: what is the qualitative difference between Drumcree and other incidents when the rule of law has been broken or flouted? There are undoubtedly quantitative differences, but I am talking about the principle. There are people sitting in the talks today who took part in the disgraceful episodes at Drumcree—

Mr. Trimble: Would the hon. Gentleman care to be more specific?

Mr. McNamara: If the cap fits, the hon. Gentleman should wear it—

Mr. Trimble: But the hon. Gentleman has no specifics.

Mr. McNamara: It remains true that the organisation of the events at Drumcree amounted to a deliberate flouting of the law.

I shall support the passage of this legislation because I want it to come into operation. If it comes into operation, that will mean that the talks are under way, with Sinn Fein present at them. I believe that by setting a date the Government would be putting Sinn Fein-IRA on notice to prove its integrity, its honesty and its sincerity. For the Prime Minister and the British Government, that would be far more sensible than spinning out the process into never-never land beyond 1 May.

5.18 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I wish to deal with two points that arose earlier in the debate. First, the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) said that the hon. Member for Foyle had been taken for a ride. I do not know—time will tell—who takes whom for a ride in the business of politics in the north of Ireland, but whoever takes the hon. Member for Foyle for a ride will have thought long and hard about it and will have done something that nobody within or outside his party has ever done during his political career. I leave it at that. I assume no false modesty when I make a factual observation about something that I know rather well.

The second point is the reference to the Irish Government made by the hon. Member for Foyle. It is not my business to look after any sovereign Government; I am usually at odds with them. I simply make the observation that the hon. Member for Foyle—

Mr. McNamara: For Upper Bann, not for Foyle.

Mr. Mallon: What a Freudian mistake! The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) doubted the Irish Government's commitment to decommissioning and to the entire process. Like me, he will be in Castle buildings tomorrow and, like me, if he has doubts, he can put them to the test by moving directly and immediately into the substantive negotiations. If he is right, he will have called their bluff and established whether that commitment exists. If the hon. Gentleman has that type of reservation, the obvious thing to do is to call their bluff and find out. That is the only way in which many things, not least the position of Sinn Fein, will be established in this entire process, whenever it ends—or perhaps I should say whenever it starts.

Four matters are fundamental to this debate on decommissioning. The first is simple and prosaic. Illegal arms can be removed from any society in only two ways: they can be taken out, or talked out. I wait to hear another alternative. They can be taken out through the efforts of the security forces and of Governments, or they can be talked out in a political context that is geared towards talking them out.

Have the two sovereign Governments on the island of Ireland, despite their enormous panoply of power, security and extra-security measures, and legislative measures—the whole corpus of security that has existed in the past 25 years in Ireland, north and south—been able to decommission through security methods in the past 25 years? I wish that the answer were yes because things would then be much easier for people in the north of Ireland, much easier for everyone politically, and much more realistic in terms of the political process in which we are involved.

Mr. Robert McCartney *rose—*

Mr. Mallon: If the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) intends to say that decommissioning has taken place through the security process, I shall gladly give him the opportunity to confirm it.

Mr. McCartney: I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman about my powers as a clairvoyant. I can assure him, however, that the view of many people in Northern Ireland is that the two sovereign Governments have not really committed themselves to a process of taking arms out of circulation. Had they done so, we might not now be seeing a futile attempt to talk them out.

Mr. Mallon: I am glad that the hon and learned Gentleman has clarified the matter. I understand that clairvoyance means looking into the future; I asked for a judgment on the past. The hon. and learned Gentleman has just questioned the motivation and integrity of successive Governments in this House for the past 25 years. Not to take seriously the decommissioning of weapons through security methods is to breach the most fundamental element of integrity that any Government must show. I often criticise this and other Governments but I do not question their integrity in terms of their intention and effort to take out those arms.

I am surprised that such a point should be made, given the evidence that exists throughout the north of Ireland—I say this not in a pejorative sense—of the inability to decommission through the security method. I do not call it a failure because it could not have been done successfully. Rather, it is an inability to decommission weapons through the normal security channels. Indeed, I have never heard anyone argue convincingly that decommissioning is a decisive security measure, however desirable it may be. Many senior security people have made it clear, publicly and privately, that it is essentially a political issue. It was never part of a realistic security strategy.

That is the first basic point. From that premise stems a number of other factors. The second basic point, which is palatable to none of us who live in the north of Ireland or elsewhere, is that if we accept that first premise we must

view decommissioning and its successful conclusion as a voluntary exercise, which, logically and necessarily, requires the co-operation of those who hold the weapons. If we are serious about decommissioning or creating the context in which decommissioning can take place, we must—hon. Members will excuse the pun—all bite the bullet.

As I said initially, we can either take out or talk out illegal weapons. Taking out did not work; talking out might work but it must be tried, otherwise the criticism of the hon. Member for North Down could be legitimate.

The Governments, with their vast security operations, have been pursuing a decommissioning policy for years, rightly seeking out and confiscating illegal weapons wherever they can be found. They will continue to do that and I hope that they are successful. However, that should not be confused with the other element of the exercise. Some people want to treat decommissioning as a matter that can simply be pre-emptively imposed on the paramilitaries. They seem to think that simply by saying, "You must decommission", decommissioning will take place at some time in the future. That is a fallacy and nonsense, and it will not happen. Nor will it happen through a security operation or series of them, irrespective of their efficiency.

When will people—I mean mainly Members of the House and in the political parties in the north of Ireland, who have come face to face with the problem and who have an emotional and a symbolic difficulty with it, as I have—start to recognise and explain to their followers that what they profess to accept involves a process of negotiations and a commitment to engage and persuade those who hold weapons that the political path is the only way forward? If we accept that there are only two options—to take illegal weapons out or to talk them out—we must accept that talking them out involves a political process. That involves negotiations, and that means negotiations with the people who hold the weapons. That is the difficulty. Biting that bullet will be the most significant factor in solving this part of the process, if the process ever starts.

The third undeniable fact is that, according to the logic of the Mitchell report, which the Government have accepted and on which they have based the Bill, and which the hon. Member for Basingstoke has accepted, decommissioning will never happen unless it is a by-product of the political process. That is another difficult reality for all of us to accept. In terms of the Mitchell report implemented to the full, decommissioning will not happen unless it stems from a political process—in other words, derives from negotiations.

The Mitchell report is clear that political progress and confidence must come first. That is, in any case, common sense to anyone who considers the context in which the paramilitaries on both sides operate. After the events of the past summer, that should be starkly etched on all our minds. Paragraph 16 of the report makes that clear. Paragraph 35 makes it even more abundantly clear that if we cannot take illegal arms out, we must talk them out, and there is only one way in which that can be done.

The fourth factor identified by Mitchell is that decommissioning must take place on a mutual basis as between both sets of paramilitaries. In that case, decommissioning can come about only as a result of a fully inclusive negotiated process. To get IRA weapons on a mutual basis as defined by Mitchell and as accepted by the Secretary of State and by the hon. Member for Upper Bann in his speech, it must be mutual between two sets of paramilitaries: the IRA and the loyalist paramilitaries. For that to happen, the harsh reality—like it or not, and some people do not like it—is that the representatives of the IRA will be there to take part in the negotiations.

It is not enough to say that one accepts the Mitchell report if one does not accept its logic. If one accepts its logic, one must accept, reluctantly or otherwise, that the paragraph about mutuality means the involvement and presence of those who would speak for the IRA in the negotiations.

One of the inconsistencies in the debate—in the talks, in the House and in Northern Ireland—is the refusal to face up to the logic of the international commission report that we have accepted. We cannot move away from the realities of it. If we do move away, we must ask ourselves whether we should go on to something new, or back to the original thesis that the arms can be taken out of the equation in some other way.

Let us remind ourselves why the Mitchell report was written: because of the inability of the people of the north of Ireland and the two Governments on the island of Ireland to resolve the matter themselves: "mea culpa" on everyone's part. That is why Mitchell, de Chalestain and Holkeri came. That is why they met all the political parties and both Governments. They were invited by the Governments to come and try to solve a problem which could not be solved previously.

I do not hear anyone disputing that, so surely we must accept the logic of the case presented by those who drew up the report. Mitchell cannot be accepted à la carte. One cannot take the little bits that happen to fit and discard the rest. One cannot say that it was relevant to a certain time, and that after a certain date it is no longer relevant. One cannot take the parts that suit one's own political view and dispense with the others.

The real value of Mitchell's report is that he has taken away some of the more distracting elements and honed it down to the logic of the position in the north of Ireland and the possibility of achieving decommissioning, either through the security method or through the political process.

There are other means by which to measure people's reactions. The hon. Member for Upper Bann spoke of litmus tests. Let me present some litmus tests of the arguments that we have heard about decommissioning. I address these directly to the Government and to many hon. Members. Do we all accept that the way forward is to implement all aspects of the Mitchell report, or is there an à la carte approach to salvage the unreal preconditions that the report was designed to overcome? Can one have Washington 3 under any other name, while at the same time espousing the Mitchell report? Everyone should consider that as the first question. A remarkable stream of illogicality derives from that inconsistency. One cannot seek a precondition, as in Washington 3, while claiming to accept and support Mitchell.

Secondly, I should like to hear those who would argue against that stating that there is no decommissioning because it is not possible in security and military terms, and will eventually come about through the political process. That will be shock for the body politic in the

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north of Ireland—it was a shock for the body politic here, for me and for many others. However, if there is to be intellectual and political honesty, we must face that question and resolve it.

The third litmus test concerns those who argue for preconditions. Do they accept that decommissioning requires an all-inclusive process? If so, how will we advance the condition necessary for that all-inclusive process which alone can deliver decommissioning? To be more negative: can we ever have decommissioning if the process is not all inclusive? To put it still more crudely: can we negotiate decommissioning without those who are charged by the republican movement to negotiate it? It is that difficult but, in many ways, that simple. It is simple in all its complexities and harsh in all its implications.

We should consider what to do about the other Mitchell criteria. Is a meaningful and inclusive process of negotiations being genuinely offered? They are the words not only of Mitchell but of a joint communique from the two Governments on 28 February following the breakdown of the ceasefire and the resumption of violence. In that joint communique—I think it is paragraph 28—the two Governments saw fit to identify that criterion as being fundamental to the entire process. If that joint communique means anything—and many on the Unionist side have invoked aspects of it—a meaningful and inclusive process must be offered to those who represent republican violence if there is to be a scintilla of hope of achieving decommissioning through the negotiating process.

We must consider those points carefully. Of course, we can use forms of words to get around anything or to paper over the real problem. The Governments have primary responsibility for the security, protection and well-being of all those within their jurisdiction. On the island of Ireland, the two Governments are responsible for protecting the people: ensuring that there are no arms and, if there are, making sure that they are decommissioned. They are the custodians of the yearning of all the people of Ireland to see peace, stability and good order replace this conflict. They cannot share the blinkered view that the certainties of conflict are preferable to the risks of peace, or the delusion that political immobility will do anything except make us the victims rather than the masters of change.

That is a bounden and an awesome responsibility of Government, and I believe that the two Governments are trying hard to fulfil it. The two Prime Ministers are meeting today, and tomorrow the Secretary of State and the Minister of State will again grapple with the problem at Castle buildings in Belfast. That problem affects us all and it will not be resolved until we are honest with ourselves and with everyone else and seek out its core and identify its remedy.

I do not speak in the debate about the entry to negotiations on behalf of Sinn Fein—I know too much about violence in the north of Ireland and I know too much about that organisation. I know—with a certainty that I feel for little else—that I can be sure that Sinn Fein is sincere and genuine about its protestations of peace not when the Secretary of State makes a subjective judgment in a limbo situation that it may or may not enter negotiations, but when it sits with all the other political parties around the table, eyeball to eyeball. I will know that it is genuine when it begins to face the realities with which those parties must grapple every day. I will know when Sinn Fein tells its supporters of the realities that it faces within the walls of Castle buildings or wherever it may be. I will know that that time has come when Sinn Fein promises to honour Mitchell principle No. 5 and says: "We did not get what we wanted, but we gave a commitment that, if we oppose anything, we shall do so only by peaceful, democratic means."

That is how we will find out whether Sinn Fein is sincere. Why should we destroy the existing process by insisting on unreal preconditions, before or at the table, when we could enjoy the support and solidarity of all parties at the table to make decommissioning the precondition for rising from the table? That is the other harsh reality; that is when decommissioning will count. It should be the precondition for getting up from the table, not sitting down at it.

I have no love for Sinn Fein nor any regard for the IRA, but I want to see them there because I want to address decommissioning. I want to solve the decommissioning problem and I know that it will not be settled in any other way. I want to help to solve the political problem but I know that that will not be possible until people face the realities head on. I know that all the parties involved in the discussions share my aims. However, it will take realism and political and intellectual rigour to face the realities rather than the shadows. It will take honesty as well.

On that point, I must clarify some comments by the hon. Member for Upper Bann. He referred indirectly to bilateral discussions with my party. I am old-fashioned and I believe that bilateral discussions should be confidential, but I must set the record straight. He tried to blame us for the delay regarding the three points advanced by his party. First, he claimed that his party should sight the legislation. We agreed and suggested that he should go to the two Governments who held the legislation. He did so and his party sighted it. That was the first condition.

The second condition was that there would be a reasonable period within which the proposed legislation would be introduced. As a small political party, we could not give that assurance, so we said go to those who might. They went to the Government and got that assurance, and we are debating the Bill today.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann made as his third point conditions for entry into negotiations. It was never anything that we discussed, because during all bilaterals and every discussion we have made it clear that we are dealing with decommissioning; that entry to negotiation is a matter, first, for this Government, based on their own legislation; secondly, for both Governments, based on the rules of procedure adopted by the talks parties for themselves; and, thirdly, that decommissioning was not a matter for Mitchell, because it ran counter to paragraph 34, which stated clearly that decommissioning would take place, and that it would be required to take place—not before, not after—during negotiations.

For that reason, because it is so fundamental, I have to say that the hon. Member for Upper Bann's memory failed him when he made his three points.

5.50 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I apologise to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for missing his remarks at the beginning of the debate.

My colleague and I were delayed because of a flight delay, which was due to the weather, although the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) will probably blame it on Drumcree; he appears to blame everything that goes wrong on Drumcree. When he next considers that subject, he might like to bear in mind the fact that it was the threats of those on Garvaghy road that ensured that the police did not do their duty and make sure that people had free access to the highway—but I know that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, would not wish me to discuss Drumcree, as we are debating the issue of decommissioning. I am sure that we shall debate Drumcree on another occasion.

I usually enjoy the speeches of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon). He has made many fine speeches, but his speech today was not one of them. I got the impression—I could be wrong—that his heart was not altogether in it, because at the centre of the argument with which he began was the necessity for him to believe that there was some prospect of the Provisional IRA genuinely ending its campaign of violence. I do not believe that any intelligent person can look at the behaviour of the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein and feel that there is any genuineness or sincerity on their part about permanently bringing their campaign of violence to a conclusion.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh offers choices, although he limits them. He says that there are two ways in which decommissioning can take place, but he makes an assumption in offering that choice—that decommissioning might take place. I do not believe that it will. Indeed, I can only take the organisations that are holding on to arms at their word when they tell us that it will not take place. I shall develop that point further later in my speech.

The issue of decommissioning has become all the more important because of the method that the Government have used on this occasion to set up a talks process. Decommissioning would not have become an obstacle if it had not been the intention of Her Majesty's Government to concede to pressure from the Government of the Irish Republic to bring terrorists to the talks table. We have had many types of political negotiations in the past, but the marked contrast is that, on all previous occasions, the talks were between legitimate—some would call them constitutional—political parties; on that basis, they might have had some difficulty in agreeing an agenda, but at least they came to the table with the level playing field that one would expect those involved in negotiations to have.

The Government decided, however, that, because of the violence that was taking place, particularly the bombs in London and the mainland, they wanted—no doubt, from their point of view, for the best of motives—to draw the IRA into a situation where it would become politically more difficult for it to carry on its campaign, and dangled before it the prospect of being involved in negotiations. That caused a major difficulty, because it required the Government to sell the idea that other political parties in Northern Ireland should get down into the gutter with the IRA and talk on its terms.

The Government set down criteria that they knew—rightly at the time—would never be met. I can recall the Secretary of State, back in 1993, saying on Radio Telefis Eireann:

"The IRA will have to give up its guns and explosives to prove violence is over".

When the process began of bringing terrorists into talks, absolute proof was required that we had a permanent and complete cessation of violence, that if there was to be a ceasefire, it was for real: if the IRA—and, for that matter, the Ulster Volunteer Force and Ulster Freedom Fighters—was to be involved in political negotiations, we had to be absolutely certain that it was totally committed to peaceful means, to use the jargon from the joint declaration. The Secretary of State outlined in that broadcast, and, indeed, in many others, that, as evidence that it was totally committed to democratic and peaceful means of resolving our problems in Northern Ireland, the IRA would have to give up its guns and explosives to prove that violence was over.

Just before the IRA ceasefire, the Secretary of State said:

"the idea that I will talk to them now, or those who represent them and argue for them, is one that would turn the stomach of decent people through the length and breadth of this Province. If you bring a bomb with you then don't expect the British Government to dignify you with the status of a constitutional politician."

I suspect that many people in Northern Ireland were saying, "Hear, hear!" to the Secretary of State as he made a common-sense utterance—the distinction between those who are legitimate politicians and those who are the front men for terrorist organisations.

At that stage, it was clear that the Government's requirement was not that constitutional politicians should move to the position of terrorist leaders, but that terrorist leaders should move and prove themselves worthy to be involved in negotiations by being exclusively engaged in democratic politics, and doing so in a peaceful way.

It was not very long, however, before the Government started to lower their sights; the Secretary of State was requiring only "substantial progress on decommissioning", and the rot was beginning to set in. It was not long before the Prime Minister told the House:

"No one has asked for the total decommissioning of all weapons before talks begin . . . 'Show your determination to seek peace by beginning to decommission.'"—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1996; Vol. 270, c. 361.]

We had moved from the situation in which guns had to be handed over to one in which the IRA had only to start the process. Then we moved to the famous Washington 3 proposal, which required paramilitary organisations to offer some arms

"as a tangible confidence building measure and to signal the start of a process."

Gradually, the Government's requirements were watered down. I find it laughable when I hear some nationalist and republican leaders—even those in leadership in the Irish Republic—chiding the Government for not moving. It flies in the face of what has happened over the past three years: the vast movement of the Government towards a position, while the IRA has not moved a centimetre from its position in 1993.

The final move—sorry, I should not say "final", because it may not be the Government's final move. The Government's position was then to accept the findings of the report of the international body, one of which was that some weaponry could be decommissioned during the process—some and not all weaponry, and certainly not at the beginning of the process, with no indication that it must be other than at the very end of that process.

Like many people in Northern Ireland, I had thought that that was the Government's final climbdown. However, many of us are a little nervous when we hear

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the Prime Minister positioning himself to blame the intelligence services for a situation that may arise. He will allow Sinn Fein-IRA into the talks process on the word of the intelligence services that a ceasefire is genuine and for real.

Are those the same intelligence service experts who advised the Prime Minister several years ago when he made a working assumption that the ceasefire was permanent? If the Prime Minister was betrayed—those were his own words—on the basis of information that he received from the intelligence services, what confidence can the community have that he will not be similarly fooled on this occasion, and that the IRA will not have conned the Government once again?

No one is more easily conned than someone who wants to be. I do not doubt that the Government—indeed, everyone in the House—want a genuine cessation of violence by the Provisional IRA, but we would be foolish and lacking in judgment if we were to fall for the same trick twice by the Provisional IRA. I have no doubt that the Provisional IRA has no intention of committing itself to a complete and permanent cessation of violence. The evidence shows that the Provisional IRA has one objective, and it is prepared to use violence—or turn it off from time to time—if that helps it to achieve its objectives.

Decommissioning means much more than simply taking guns out of the Northern Ireland process. One could easily accept the argument often advanced by the Social Democratic and Labour party that, if the IRA were to hand over its weaponry tomorrow, within a short time it could substantially replenish it. I am advised by the security forces that the IRA has sophisticated manufacturing means at its disposal. Even if it could not bring in weapons from outside, it would be capable of producing high-class weaponry. It is not simply a matter of getting weaponry out of existence—good and right though that would be. To use language on which I am not keen, we need confidence-building measures.

We need tangible evidence that the Provisional IRA is serious. That tangible evidence does not come from the words that it uses in a statement. Whether or not it uses the P-word—permanently peaceful—we need actual evidence that it is not still targeting, training and recruiting people. We need to know whether it intends to continue its campaign. We know from sad experience that, while it was telling us that it was leading "the Irish peace process" and that everyone else was dragging behind, and how enthusiastic it was to have a peaceful and democratic resolution of our problems, it was stacking a garage in this city for another bombing campaign. It was buying vehicles that it could use to bomb Thiepval barracks in Lisburn. It is clear that there was no genuine intent on its part to have a permanent cessation of violence.

It is incumbent on the Government to ensure not only that the Provisional IRA includes the necessary wording in its statement, and that the intelligence services have confirmed that the Provisional IRA is taking no action on any front, but that intelligence sources are allowed a significant period to test that fully and decommissioning takes place. That is the importance of decommissioning to me. It is tangible evidence that the Provisional IRA is serious.

I say that as someone who has seen no evidence that the Provisional IRA has any intention of calling a permanent cessation of violence, and of committing and submitting itself to the democratic wishes of the people of Northern Ireland.

The debate has already been referred to as an academic exercise. Few hon. Members believe that the Provisional IRA is about to rush forward with its weaponry and offer it up for decommissioning. The leadership of the IRA-Sinn Fein organisation has said that it does not intend to hand over one bullet or one ounce of Semtex until the end of the process, provided that it has what it wants out of that process. It is a thoroughly conditional preparedness to decommission. It says, "If you give us what we want, we'll hand over our guns." It is in effect saying that we can buy its weapons by concessions. That is the IRA's position—even so, I suspect that a few of its members would not want to hand over the stockpile of arms that they undoubtedly have in Northern Ireland and in the Irish Republic.

The Bill is likely to be one of the least used pieces of legislation that the House has ever debated or passed. I suspect that it will have dust on it, and that it will not be used that much by civil servants to determine whether the right means and methods are used to decommission weaponry. It gives me little comfort to know that this legislation will be on the statute book, because it is not backed up by any reality that decommissioning will take place. That is not to say that the Government should not go through with the exercise: the paramilitaries should abide by it, because they have no excuses for not decommissioning.

The Mitchell report is clear. The international team said:

"the paramilitary organisations will not decommission any arms prior to all-party negotiations. That was the unanimous and emphatically expressed view of the representatives of the political parties close to paramilitary organisations".

I part company with the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, in that I have never given any commitment to the Mitchell report. I do not agree with it, and I never have. I support the six principles that are contained in it, but I do not believe that its proposals or recommendations are worthy of support. The proposals have no integrity.

Mr. Mallon: Given the fact that the legislation is modelled on the modalities in the Mitchell report, will the hon. Gentleman vote against the Bill on the ground that it has no integrity?

Mr. Robinson: I shall come to my attitude to the legislation. It does not follow from what I have said that I will vote against the principle of decommissioning in the legislation. Naturally, a series of amendments will be tabled in Committee, when attempts will be made to right the wrong of Mitchell and the Bill by seeking changes in the legislation and voting for such changes—if we are permitted to sit on the Committee; that is yet to be settled.

The principle—if it can be called that—contained in the international body's report is that, because the paramilitary organisations say that they will not hand over any weapons, the overall principle should be given up, whether it is right or wrong. The body takes a purely pragmatic approach to decommissioning, rather than a principled approach. Because some people say that

decommissioning must happen before talks and others say that it will not, it adds those statements together and divides by two, ending up with the idea of some action during the talks. I see nothing very principled about that approach. I do not accept that politicians should reduce the level of the democratic process to suit those who have abused it and done everything possible to undermine it.

The Mitchell report states:

"We were told that the clearest demonstration of adherence to democratic principles, and of a permanent end to . . . violence, is the safe removal and disposal of paramilitary arms, and that at this time only a start to decommissioning will provide the confidence necessary for all-party negotiations to commence."

I remind the House that everyone who has been present at the talks has signed up to the Mitchell principles, one of which is total decommissioning on the part of paramilitary organisations. Indeed, the Mitchell report goes further than simply agreeing that that should happen; according to the report, the principles should be not only laid down but honoured. That constitutes a requirement for something to be done.

What disappoints me—that is an understatement—is that the Government are quite happy to move on to other matters. Having talked about the issue of decommissioning, which they define as "addressing" it, they are content to move on without actually doing anything about it—without requiring paramilitary organisations to decommission.

The answer to the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh is simply this: the paramilitary organisations will not decommission unless they are required to do so. If they are left with the choice—if they are told that, unless they decommission, they cannot be part of the process—they will be far more likely to give in weapons than if they continue to be told, as the Government are now telling them, that perhaps at the end of the process they can hand in a few guns. If the Government had said from the beginning, "These are the terms on which you can enter negotiations: it is a necessity for you to hand in weapons," it would have been clear to all that, if they wanted to be part of the talks, that was what they would have to do. Now they know that all they have to do is stand still, and the Government will move to their position.

The legislation has a time frame. It suggests a five-year period—a lifespan of half a decade. I find that strange, although I am sure that the Minister will explain when he winds up the debate. The Bill runs parallel to the talks process. The two go together; one is intended to aid the other. Yet, under the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc.) Act 1996, the talks process has at most only another 18 months to go. I wonder why the Government have given the Bill a lifespan that extends beyond the period of the talks.

It could be argued that the decommissioning schemes can run to up to 12 months, and that therefore a 12-month period should be provided for weapons that are surrendered on the last day of the talks, when agreement is finally reached; but even that does not stretch the period to five years. I wonder what the Government have in mind in keeping the legislation in being after the lifetime of the negotiations has ended. Are they considering another scheme? Have they other proposals on the shelf which they intend to bring out? Perhaps they will enlighten us before the evening is out.

I am a little worried about dealing with legislation that leaves it open to the Government to design decommissioning schemes with which we may be entirely unhappy. At this stage, we must take the Government very much on trust. I would not have thought it impossible for them to present us with a sample scheme, and I hope that they will do precisely that before the Committee stage is over. I should like to hear something about not just the Northern Ireland arrangements, but those in the rest of the United Kingdom.

In regard to the rest of the United Kingdom, if I said that I was uneasy it would minimise my concern far too much. I am deeply concerned that the Government are offering the House legislation to deal with Northern Ireland in this manner: they are saying that certain evidence can be destroyed when it relates to Northern Ireland but that, if the evidence relates to Great Britain, they will adopt a different course. I hope that the Minister will deal with that inconsistency; undoubtedly, either he or a colleague of his will have to do so in Committee.

I have attempted to make it clear that, while legislation has been presented to us today, I have no confidence that it will ever be used. I do not believe that the Provisional IRA is serious about decommissioning, or, indeed, about ending its campaign of violence. To that extent, we must be engaged in an academic exercise. I regret to have to say that, but it is so.

6.16 pm

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): Many of the issues, both general and specific, about which I had intended to speak have already been dealt with. It would be easy to dispose of some of our problems if they could all be fitted into neat and pithy aphorisms such as, "You can take the gun out of politics or you can talk the gun out of politics," but, when some of those pithy statements are examined, they turn out to be rather more complex than they seem.

Let us examine the statement referred to by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon). Talking the gun out of politics means bringing members of Sinn Fein-IRA into the talks. On the present terms, they will come into the talks without having decommissioned any weapons. That means talking to them about how they are going to make a democratic commitment when they still possess weapons.

That was recognised by both Governments from an early date. Paragraph 10 of the Downing street declaration implicitly stated that those who wished to be involved in democratic dialogue would have to give up violence permanently. The fact that everyone considered that it would have to be permanent is evidenced by a number of statements. On 16 December 1993, in the Dail Eireann, Dick Spring made it abundantly clear that Sinn Fein-IRA would not be allowed to comment on the democratic process, take a look around to see what it offered and, if it did not offer anything that it should have offered, resort to violence again. The commitment had to be permanent.

Our memories have been somewhat dimmed by the passage of time, but everyone will recollect that between 16 December 1993—the date of the joint declaration—and 31 August 1994, when the IRA declared its ceasefire, there was much talk about permanence. The IRA made many calls for clarification. All of us were told by the Irish Government and the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) that "complete" meant "permanent", but people who considered the language knew that "complete" was simply a definition of the ceasefire and

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gave no hint whatever about its duration. The word "permanent" was a term of duration; the word "complete" was not.

Of course, the British Government were more sceptical about the nature of the declaration than the Irish Government and the hon. Member for Foyle. After three months, the British Government assumed that the ceasefire was permanent, and worked on that basis. The difficulties thereafter have been outlined by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), who has recited accurately, as has the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), Sinn Fein's progress and the relationship of Sinn Fein to the British Government.

As late as 28 August 1995, in response to a call from Mr. Albert Reynolds, Mr. Gerry Adams and the hon. Member for Foyle, at a peace conference at Killala, for Sinn Fein to be admitted without any decommissioning or pre-condition, the Northern Ireland Office stated that Sinn Fein's failure to decommission weapons of some sort before entry would be irreconcilable with the principles of constitutional democracy. In response to that impasse, the Mitchell commission was deputed to do what the Governments had been unable to do: to determine how one could compromise between Sinn Fein's demands and the requirement of democrats, principally the pro-Union parties, that they would not sit down and have discussions—nor could they—unless all the parties to those discussions submitted themselves to the principles of democratic procedure and permanently forsook violence as a means of attaining political objectives.

The Mitchell report of the international body was supposed to solve that dilemma. The solution did not find favour with the majority of the pro-Union parties. I share the views of the hon. Member for Belfast, East, in that I never at any time endorsed the whole of the Mitchell report, or agreed to support it. I unequivocally support the six Mitchell principles, but that is an entirely different matter.

The key paragraphs in the Mitchell report are paragraphs 34 and 35, which are repeated in all the Government documents, in the Command Paper of 16 April 1996 and in the Prime Minister's recent statement of policy. In particular, paragraphs 34 and 35 offer no foundation for an acceptable form of decommissioning. Paragraph 34 is nothing more than a suggested compromise between the pro-Union requirement that some decommissioning occur before the start of all-party negotiations, and Sinn Fein's declared position that there would be no decommissioning of any sort until an agreed settlement that it could endorse had been reached.

The pro-Union position before the Mitchell report was similar to the British Government's position on 28 August 1995: to admit Sinn Fein into all-party negotiations before it had commenced a process of negotiation was irreconcilable with constitutional and democratic principles. The Government, however, suffered a sea change after the report.

The suggested compromise in paragraph 34 of the report was that some decommissioning should take place during the process rather than before or after. The reasoning behind that suggested compromise is flawed entirely in its basic premise that both sides were starting off from positions that were equidistant from the middle: Senator Mitchell's compromise. That was not true.

The pro-Union parties were not involved in violence of any sort, did not support violence as a means of obtaining political objectives and were content to rely entirely on democratic procedures as a means of obtaining their goals, but Sinn Fein had a democratic mandate of some 15 to 16 per cent. and was a minority party. In the circumstances, Sinn Fein-IRA was dedicated not to democratic procedure—because a party with that proportion of support could never hope to achieve its objectives by democratic political means—but entirely to the gun and the bomb as the means for securing its political objectives.

In the circumstances, to suggest that Sinn Fein-IRA should be admitted to the talks and be part of a process, and that it would drip feed small amounts of guns or Semtex in return for political concessions, was absolutely and totally undemocratic and unacceptable. The decommissioning of weapons is to be viewed not as a surrender by anyone to anyone, but as a mere acceptance of democratic principles and procedures as the basis for the settlement of disputes and the attainment of political objectives.

The flaws in the reasoning in paragraph 34 are further illustrated by the next divine paragraph to which so much devotion is granted: paragraph 35. The suggestion in paragraph 34 is said to offer an opportunity to use the process of decommissioning to build confidence by offering progress on political issues as the price for modest mutual steps on decommissioning. Stripped of its political padding, paragraph 35 suggests decommissioning in return for political concessions.

The suggestion of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh that, faced eyeball to eyeball with democratic procedures and the arguments of democrats, Sinn Fein-IRA would somehow crumble, and feel shamed and unable to sustain its arguments does not bear thinking about.

Mr. Mallon: We would find out.

Mr. McCartney: With respect, democrats do not need to find out what the objectives of Sinn Fein-IRA are. It has been amply demonstrated not only that Sinn Fein cannot be trusted, but that it does not intend ever to use any methodology other than violence to attain its objectives.

If paragraph 35 of Mitchell means—as I submit that it does—that there will be modest decommissioning in return for political concessions, it poses two questions. First, who will be the judge of whether sufficient political concessions have been made? Secondly, who will assess the worth of those concessions in terms of the guns and Semtex with which they are to be won? The answer is that the terrorists of both sides will determine whether the concessions they have obtained are sufficient to warrant some small or modest handing over of weaponry.

It is possible to have a permanent cessation if we accept the IRA's price for a permanent cessation of violence. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh asked how we can talk guns out of the Northern Ireland context. Presumably, it will happen when those who employ bombs and weapons to secure their objectives decide that those objectives have been secured.

Peace can always be obtained at a price. Peace could have been obtained in 1939 or in 1940 by meeting Adolph Hitler's modest requirements. The principle is exactly the same in both cases, albeit Adolf Hitler was operating on a rather grander scale and had many more munitions than Sinn Fein-IRA. He had political demands in middle Europe, and he wanted them satisfied. When he failed to achieve them by negotiation, he went to war. But he did so only after negotiation failed. He got what he wanted through negotiation in Czechoslovakia, but he failed to do so in Poland. We are witnessing exactly the same type of anti-democratic and fascist activities by Sinn Fein-IRA.

We can examine the principles of decommissioning only by considering the terms upon which decommissioning may be achieved, and by considering the relationship between the terms of any new ceasefire and the issue of decommissioning. The permanence of a cessation of IRA violence has a direct bearing on the issue of decommissioning and the modalities for its implementation—which is the subject of this Bill. The language used to describe any new cessation of violence must deal not only with the ceasefire's nature but with its duration.

If a ceasefire is declared to be both complete and permanent, it would be difficult to discover any logical basis either for the retention of weapons or for objections to agreements providing for an immediate commencement of the decommissioning process. Conversely, a failure to declare that a ceasefire is permanent, coupled with a reluctance to decommission—either before, during or after negotiation—must be construed as a very strong indication of rejection of an absolute commitment to democratic procedure, and as a reservation that, if such procedure does not afford an acceptable outcome, there will be a return to violence.

Those concepts were precisely encapsulated by Mr. Dick Spring's statement to the Dail Eireann on the day after the joint declaration. He said precisely that one cannot walk in, have a look at what is on offer within the democratic process and then reject it and return to the bomb and the bullet if it fails to measure up to one's expectations. The Irish Government and the Social Democratic and Labour party would expect pro-Union people to accept exactly that position. I believe that such conditions are wholly and totally unacceptable, and I think that the overwhelming majority of pro-Union people in Ulster feel the same way.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) made some very perceptive comments, and he has grasped the essence of the position held by Sinn Fein-IRA. He said that the IRA was humiliated by the British Government's attitude after the ceasefire, which caused it to feel that it was being required to surrender, whereas the IRA's position was that it was a combatant and, in one sense, of equal status with the British state. He said that the IRA's attitude was that it would not surrender to anyone, that it held its arms legitimately and that it was a lawful force. I accept entirely his analysis of the situation.

Those factors bear very heavily on the IRA's attitude to what is euphemistically called the peace process. If viewed from a pro-Union and democratic position, the peace process is about democrats negotiating together, on democratic principles and with democratic procedures, to discover a solution to a problem. That is how we on the pro-Union side regard the peace process. It is not regarded in that manner by Sinn Fein-IRA. Sinn Fein-IRA does not think of itself as an unlawful organisation. It thinks of itself as the true spiritual and democratic heir of the Sinn Fein of 1918.

In one sense, Sinn Fein-IRA does not even acknowledge as lawful the Government of the Republic of Ireland. It regards the course on which it is set as a national war, on behalf of the only people who really matter: those who truly know and hold the essential spirit of Irish nationalism. Therefore, in engaging the British Government, Sinn Fein-IRA does not wish to sit down and negotiate with lesser mortals and lesser parties—from the Ulster Democratic Unionist party and the Ulster Unionist party, right down to the humble United Kingdom Unionist party, not to mention the women's coalition and the Social Democratic and Labour party.

Those parties and individuals are irrelevant to Sinn Fein-IRA. At best, they form part of the democratic window-dressing or backdrop against which Sinn Fein-IRA, as a combatant, will conduct not political negotiations but conflict resolution, or a peace conference, between itself and the British state, in which the two sides hold their weapons lawfully and legitimately. If it starts from the basic premise that it holds its weapons lawfully and legitimately, not only will it not hand over a significant amount of weaponry or engage in a process in which weapons are taken out of the political context, it will not hand over a single rusty revolver or a pound of sweating Semtex. The reason it cannot do so is ideological—*[Interruption.]* Those who have a more profound knowledge of weaponry are perhaps signifying that Semtex does not sweat, unlike dynamite or gelignite. I bow to their superior knowledge. I was aware of that difference, but I did not think it one of great substance. I know that there are those who turn their microscopic diligence to particularities, but I think that we should concern ourselves with broader principles of rather more importance.

As I was saying, there is no way in which Sinn Fein-IRA will ever—before, during or after the negotiations—hand over any weaponry unless it is convinced of one of two things: first, that there is an immediate concession to its demands, which can be crystallised as "Brits out" and self-determination on an all-Ireland basis—that is unlikely to occur—or, secondly, that it is offered a political framework that might just, positively and without there being much doubt about it, offer to it within a span of perhaps less than 15 or 20 years the prospect that its objectives will be achieved. They are the only two possibilities, but there is no possibility whatever that it will throw away the only weapon—violence—which has ever succeeded in advancing its cause.

In what other political or democratic setting would a party that can conjure up what was for it a very good election result of only 15 per cent. of the vote—obtained, I believe, by conning the electorate, or a sizeable proportion of it, into voting for it on the basis that it might engage in peace talks—have the clout and political influence with two sovereign Governments that Sinn Fein has demonstrated? No one is going to convince me—or, I hope, any other hon. Member—that the influence that Sinn Fein has had on Governments has been a product of rational thought or of powerful argument or analysis; it has been founded on nothing other than the bomb and the bullet. When I hear it being suggested that such people

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might, when confronted with the views of democrats, be persuaded that they should give it all up, I almost abandon hope.

I shall now comment on matters raised by the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam). She made a number of references to Drumcree, mark 1, mark 2 and the possibility of turning our thoughts to mark 3. We should all understand that the events at Drumcree and Harryville are not conditions, but symptoms. They are symptoms of a majority who have lost confidence in the capacity of their Government to protect their citizenship and the value of that citizenship and to give them a sense that they are cared for and cherished equally with all other British citizens.

There is a growing feeling, which is not lessened by terminology such as that used in the joint declaration, that the United Kingdom has no selfish, economic or strategic interest in remaining in Northern Ireland. When I recently had discussions with the Prime Minister and pointed out just how powerful that statement had been in knocking the confidence of the pro-Union people and of raising their anxiety about their constitutional position almost to the level of paranoia, he remarked that it was not a new statement; that it had been said before. Lest he was under any illusion that I was not aware that it had been said before, I told him that yes, it had been used before—by the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) in a speech at Coleraine in, I believe, 1991—but I was able to enlighten the Prime Minister that that was not the real fons et origo: it was first used by Mr. John Hume on 19 September 1988 in *The Irish Times* when he was reporting the conclusions of his first series of meetings with Gerry Adams. That is the source of the statement.

What we see manifested at Drumcree, and to some extent at Harryville, is a situation that has enabled the head of the community relations agency to state recently that there has never, since the agency was formed, been a worse, or more divided, or more bitter, difference between the two communities in Northern Ireland. It is something of a paradox that the two Governments should be striving for peace and telling the world that they are involved in a peace process when the main outcome of that process is the utter destruction of community relations in Northern Ireland. That tells us something.

The hon. Members for Kingston upon Hull, North and for Redcar and others made powerful comments on how the rule of law had been flouted and breached at Drumcree. It was taken to be a dreadful thing. The people who assembled at Drumcree—I speak for perhaps 97 or 98 per cent. of those who were there—were not National Front louts or agents provocateurs out to stir up those called from every airt and part. They were solid.

I went as an observer. I am not an Orangeman; I am not in the Black or in any of the Orange institutions, and I do not march on any occasion, so I went as an observer. I can tell hon. Members that 99 per cent. of the people assembled there were in employment. They were farmers, artisans, labourers and small shopkeepers—people who pay their rates and have no criminal record. They were the same sort of people as those who numbered nearly 250,000 and who, on 15 or 16 November 1985, protested on the streets of Belfast about the Anglo-Irish agreement.

The lesson to be taken from the presence of people in such huge numbers is that there is something wrong with the laws being imposed on them. It is easy to say—as some of those who have spoken today have done—that the law is being flouted. The law was flouted by John Hampden over ship-money—there is a statue of him in the Lobby—and by John Wilkes when he objected to general warrants. The law on what was once the poll tax was flouted by a large number of people and with a degree of violence. In all three instances, the law was changed because it was believed that the demonstrations showed that there was something wrong, not with the people who flouted the law, but with the administration or the imposition of the laws that the people were flouting.

Governments should take note when a substantial number of people protest. The reasons for the protests should be considered, not simply swept aside.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not essential for the majority and minority communities in Northern Ireland to respect each other? We know of the disgraceful situation in which people who want to go and pray are being intimidated. Why does the hon. and learned Gentleman believe that the majority community has lost confidence in the United Kingdom when, for 26 years, successive Governments—this will continue if terrorism continues—have made it clear that, no matter what the cost in blood and money, we shall not give in to terrorism? The wishes of the majority community in Northern Ireland, whatever they may be at any given moment—we know what they are now—will be respected. There is no question of Northern Ireland being forced into a unitary state against its will. That is my view as well. Obviously, I take a different view from the hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. McCartney: I wish that what the hon. Gentleman has just said were true and that the perception of the majority—they are not all fools—was that successive United Kingdom Governments have given the people of Northern Ireland that assurance. With respect, that is not the case. I draw a clear distinction between democracy—the right of a majority to determine the constitutional identity of the state to which they wish to belong—and the ugly face of majoritarianism, when a majority think that they can do whatever they like because they are a majority. I am a pluralist. I believe that everyone in Northern Ireland, regardless of religion, political aspiration or background, should have equal opportunities and an equal place before the law. We should be equal in all things and other cultures should be respected.

I deplore the behaviour of those who are obstructing churchgoers at Harryville. I made it clear at the Northern Ireland forum on Friday that I thought that the behaviour of those attacking or intimidating churchgoers at Harryville was despicable and beneath contempt. I believe that those were the words that I used. Similar words were used by representatives of the Ulster Unionist party and the Democratic Unionist party. I do not want it suggested, even indirectly, that, because one is a Unionist, one is some sort of sectarian bigot. Unfortunately, that idea has been put about and has seeped by osmosis into the minds and attitudes of many hon. Members, who unthinkingly suppose that a staunch Unionist is automatically an intellectual backwoodsman or religious sectarian bigot, properly belonging in the mid-16th century. That is far from the truth.

The Bill is welcome. It is a nice cart in which the carcase of decommissioning will ultimately be moved if we ever get the horse and some of the wheels back on. It is appropriate for doing a job, but that job has not yet been designated. I suspect, as does the hon. Member for Belfast, East that the dust will settle on the cart before it is ever put in motion to transport any weapons or Semtex to a place where they can be disposed of.

I welcome the Bill. I share the reservations of the hon. Member for Belfast, East, which I hope will be dealt with later. Like him, I view with some suspicion the five-year time span for the decommissioning process, when the negotiations and the forum have a much more limited time span. I am sure that most of those anomalies will be explained.

All hon. Members should realise that we are dealing with people committed to an idea that it is difficult for those who have not lived cheek by jowl with them all their lives to comprehend. The members of Sinn Fein-IRA are dedicated to their objectives. They have not moved an inch, nor will they. They have conned not only successive British Governments, but Senator Mitchell and his two colleagues.

The infrastructure of the Mitchell report has been destroyed. I do not want to recite the details, but we all know that, when Senator Mitchell concluded in January this year that the intentions of those in Sinn Fein-IRA were good, they had been working away through November and December preparing for Canary wharf. They were even at it during the much-heralded visit to Belfast of President Clinton. It had all been organised. Further depredations were in preparation for Hammersmith bridge and Hammersmith itself, as recent finds showed, as well as Osnabrück, Manchester and Thiepval.

Let us forget for a moment about the grand constitutional issue. If we were asked to enter into a business commitment in our everyday lives with business associates or people in whom we were required to put trust who had been behaving as Sinn Fein-IRA has behaved, with a similar track record for lies, deceit, perfidy and violence, we would say that we would rather not do business with them at all, but that if we had to it would be only with clear guarantees and absolute sureties that they would deliver on their bargain.

First, we need the terms of the contract. The declaration of a cessation of violence must be complete and permanent. Secondly, they must give a physical earnest of their good intentions and back up their words by delivering a down payment of arms and bombs to show that they mean what they say. Thirdly, if they are committed to the democratic process, they will agree that negotiations on the political strand must go on without any connection with or interdependence on the decommissioning process. There can be no question of guns and bomb-making material being handed over in return for political concessions.

With those safeguards, I would still have reservations, but I might be persuaded to forgive my brother 70 times seven times. My goodness, unless we are absolute fools, we need some form of guarantee. I do not see any forthcoming.

6.59 pm

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): First, I apologise for having arrived late as my flight was delayed by bad weather.

I welcome the Bill and I shall explain why it is essential. I believe that it was devised not in expectation but in hope, although that hope is fairly uncertain. In order to understand the Bill, it is necessary to examine the nature of terrorism in Northern Ireland in the past 25 or 26 years.

In Northern Ireland, terrorism is not the spontaneous action of a group of people who feel aggrieved; it derives from a carefully conceived strategy that was created not by the IRA but by Mao Tse Tung in his formula for insurrection. That formula has been used by many in the past, including Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. It has been used by Sinn Fein-IRA for the past 25 years. It involves the structure of terrorism being carefully established, its final objective having been decided in advance.

I shall not explain the strategy in detail, but say only that it involves setting up structures within every stratum of society—in educational establishments, community and housing groups, trade unions and the civil service. It seeks to permeate every level of society. It then involves various degrees of violence in an attempt to destroy the infrastructure by attacking and murdering members of the security services, the police and the Army, getting rid of political opponents and dominating certain parts of the region in order to affect every aspect of life there every day of the week and every week of the year. It involves continuing such action for as long as necessary.

It is then possible to increase or reduce terrorist activity. In August 1994, when the level of attrition against the terrorist campaign in Northern Ireland was at its highest, a saviour appeared for the IRA who suggested that its members might be interested in becoming bona fide democrats and entering the political arena on an equal basis with other politicians.

Those of us who understood the strategy employed by the IRA knew that it was a falsehood. We knew that the IRA recognised the old adage that time equals space equals will and that from time to time terrorists can concede space. That is exactly what the IRA did. In August 1994, it conceded space for 17 months. That space gave it time to change the will of society not only in Northern Ireland, but throughout the United Kingdom and further afield. That was a clever ploy that created a certain degree of complacency at the highest levels of society and at the heart of the British Government and other Governments who were interested in Northern Ireland affairs.

Everyone is wise with hindsight and it is now obvious what the IRA was up to at the time. It had time to reorganise itself and move its personnel around in order to prevent the leaks that permitted the amount of attrition that the security services had achieved until then. However, those of us who recognised what was happening were concerned about another aspect of terrorism that permeates every level of society on a daily basis. I refer to the media. I do not suggest that all those in the media are fools, but many are impressed and motivated by what Sinn Fein-IRA hopes to achieve, and press activity often affects other parts of society and the attitude of other Governments such as that of the United States.

At the time, many of us felt that we should find a means whereby international opinion could become better versed in the reality of terrorism. On that basis, the Mitchell commission was established and asked to examine from

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an international point of view the problems created by terrorism in Northern Ireland and whether they could be dealt with effectively.

I do not find much fault with the conclusions of the Mitchell commission. Its three members displayed a great deal of sincerity and in section III of the report set out valid principles. However, they might well have reached those conclusions without ever setting foot in Northern Ireland. The principles defined in section III are internationally accepted. Section VI of the report sets out guidelines on the modalities for decommissioning and contains a great deal of useful material. However, having accepted that, I cannot agree with the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) that every aspect of the Mitchell report should be treated as if it were the gospel truth.

My justification for that attitude is contained in paragraph 25 of the report, which states:

"We"—

that is, the commission—

"have concluded that there is a clear commitment on the part of those in possession of such arms to work constructively to achieve full and verifiable decommissioning as part of the process of all-party negotiations".

Because that premise, or element of the commission's reasoning, was wrong, the logic—irrespective of how perfect it is—that ensues is flawed. In respect of the legislation, it is important that we should take the one thing that is necessary in order to progress the principles contained in the Mitchell report, without paying too much attention—I say this with the greatest respect for the three members of the commission—to the flawed reasoning that occurs in part of the report.

I should first make my position clear by saying that my understanding of terrorism as perpetrated over the past 25 or 26 years by provisional Sinn Fein-IRA is that it intends never to abandon the strategy to which it is attached. It does not matter what we do—on that point I agree with the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) and the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney). My colleagues in the Ulster Unionist party and I are not moving forward in the present process in the belief that the members of IRA-Sinn Fein are redeemable or that they want to be redeemed. They are committed to a strategy that is based on violence and that is intended to take them forward into the next millennium.

It is a strategy not only of military terrorism, but of social and economic terrorism as well. We have seen social terrorism over the past two years, when Sinn Fein-IRA orchestrated activity on the Ormeau road and on the Garvaghy road that was in direct contradiction of the very principles for which the civil rights movement had marched 27 years earlier—the freedom to go anywhere on the public highway and the freedom to be treated equally with every other citizen in Northern Ireland. Sinn Fein has told us, however, that that is not to be the case and that the Protestant community are not to be allowed to march or to engage in activities that they themselves are not prepared to sanction in certain parts of Northern Ireland.

Much as I deplore the events in Harryville in recent weeks—here I add my voice to the condemnation already expressed by the hon. and learned Member for North Down—that violence, albeit inexcusable, is reciprocal and is designed to drive people in Northern Ireland into ghettos. Why should the IRA want to drive people into ghettos? One of the fundamentals of Mao's philosophy of terrorism is that the terrorists must totally dominate certain elements of the territory being contested so as to eventually provoke a civil war—a Bosnia-type situation. That is Sinn Fein-IRA's present objective.

That is such a horrible thought that people will want to discard my words, saying, "He's off on a flight of fancy." I remind hon. Members that, in June 1995, when I explained that the Sinn Fein-IRA decision to call an end to the ceasefire had already been taken, people called it a flight of fancy. They did not want to believe that it could happen or that it would happen, so they turned their backs on the very thought. As legislators, we in this House have a greater responsibility—we have to face reality and understand our terrorists' overall strategy towards their ultimate goal if we are to take effective steps to counter that strategy.

Although I spell out in some detail the direction in which IRA-Sinn Fein travels, that does not mean that I believe that it is inevitable that it will reach its goal—I do not. If, however, we honestly believe that we can somehow incorporate those people into the very heart of democracy, we are riding for a fall—and a mighty fall at that. We have to look at providing, sincerely and honestly, the opportunity for Sinn Fein to move into the democratic process. I cannot say that I do not want Sinn Fein to become part of the democratic process. I want to believe that that could happen, but I am convinced that it will not. If it does not happen, we have to marginalise it and every other terrorist organisation that might decide to test the will of Government, to test the democratic process and to test the will of society as a whole.

We begin to do that by establishing an international commission for disarmament and verification of the process, so that we have a focus of attention, not only for the people of Northern Ireland or the people of the United Kingdom, but for the world as whole. The world has to understand that it is intolerable and impossible for a democracy—even one with all the flaws that our democracy has and that we in this place strive daily and weekly to put right—to accommodate 100 tonnes of modern, sophisticated weapons in the hands of terrorists.

The very existence of this legislation and the establishment of a disarmament and verification committee challenges every terrorist who walks our streets. It challenges him physically, in terms of his right to have guns, bombs, mortars and all the various terrorist equipment that he may possess. It also challenges our society in terms of the psychological warfare that has been waged against us day by day and which we sometimes forget. It is so easy to forget the psychological warfare—the economic and the social warfare—when there is blood on the streets and people are shot to death or blown up. We tend to think of the physical pain and tragedy alone.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does my hon. Friend agree that, after 28 years, the pro-Union community in Northern Ireland has largely come together to say clearly to Government and to terrorists that enough is enough and we will have no more?

Mr. Maginnis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and he is absolutely right, but I think I begin to see—and,

God knows, we have waited long enough for it—in the Government, and indeed in the main Opposition party, a realisation that they too cannot for ever fall for the ploys and the propaganda of the people who have never stood by a single, solitary promise that they have made. One has only to consider the reports in the Sunday papers in the past couple of months to see how IRA-Sinn Fein dangles our democracy on a string. One minute it says that there will be a permanent ceasefire. Then it says that there will not be permanent ceasefire. Then it says that there will be a temporary ceasefire which could be extended. Or it says that there will not be a Christmas ceasefire this year for the first time in many years. There is no sincerity in any of those leaks. They are merely stories leaked to try to impress on the Prime Minister that he should take a course of action ultimately designed to further the interests of the IRA.

The Prime Minister is in a position—like everyone in the House and in this country—to look coolly at the record of IRA-Sinn Fein over the past 26 years and ask, first, whether there has ever been any sincerity. Secondly, we should ask whether there has ever been any justification whatever for the death and destruction that has been visited on this nation—for Canary wharf, for Manchester, for Warrington, for Enniskillen, for the Droppin' Well inn, for Thiepval, for Osnabruck or for all the other acts of violence. There is no justification unless one believes the IRA's assertion that if a majority of people vote against its declared political aspiration, it has a right by force of arms to make people pay for using the democratic process.

I say, on behalf of my party, and—I believe—on behalf of many people in Northern Ireland from both traditions and throughout the rest of the United Kingdom that we want peace. We want to be left at peace and we want to provide the opportunity for every individual, good, bad and indifferent at this time, to move into the democratic process, as is his right. But we cannot go on making excuses to incorporate in the system those who would turn democracy on its head. Those people have a choice. They must accept the system or they must be marginalised.

I was interested in the words of the Prime Minister in his weekend interview when he said that if there was a ceasefire, he would not wait too long until he made a decision about whether it was genuine and people could move into the democratic process. That has been interpreted in some quarters as the Prime Minister saying that he will not wait too long before admitting people to the democratic process, but the Prime Minister knows that that is an impossibility. I shall give the House my interpretation of what the Prime Minister meant. He meant that we know beyond doubt the intention of IRA-Sinn Fein and, unless it stands that intention on its head immediately it announces a ceasefire, we do not have to wait too long before we can say that it is yet another tactical ploy and those people must be marginalised.

The disarmament and verification commission, which I hope will be set up quickly under the terms of this enabling legislation, will—I hope—be a focus that will overcome the naive and sometimes malicious support that IRA-Sinn Fein finds in the most peculiar places—aye, even among those who sit on the Benches in this House. That support is sometimes naive, sometimes malicious and even treacherous and we have seen it all over the past few months and years. If we establish the commission, as I hope we will, it must be done the moment the legislation goes through the House. There must be no delay, but difficulties could arise. Knowing the mechanics of setting up a disarmament and verification committee, my party suggested to the two Governments a way to speed that up. One could appoint a commission-designate. It would have no power to act as a disarmament and verification commission until the legislation, here and in the Irish Republic, was properly enacted, but it could do preparatory work that did not require the legislation. It could begin to consider the logistics, the technical and communications equipment that would be required and the personnel who would be needed. Of course, it could also begin—since it would itself be a user—to assist the preparation of the schemes, for the Irish Republic's jurisdiction, and the regulations, for this jurisdiction, that will be required to move the process forward. We found no great opposition from the Government to that suggestion, which could have been the beginning of the process and would have opened up progress along one track. Progress on one track would inevitably have opened up progress along the other, political track.

We have heard fine words and avowals from the Irish Government about decommissioning and the beginning of the peace process. However, we have no peace process now. We have a political process, but there is nothing peaceful about the situation in which we live. Despite all their avowals, the Irish Government have refused steadfastly to progress one iota and have walked away from our suggestions. These are the people who tell us that they want to embrace Ulster Unionists and that they have a regard for us. They say that if only we would embrace them, their fondness would have no bounds. But the one thing that they cannot do is to meet their responsibilities—side by side with our Government—for the arms and explosives stored in their jurisdiction and within the British Government's jurisdiction.

When President Clinton came to Ireland last year, he told us:

> "You must stand firm against terror. You must say to those who still would use violence for political objectives—you are the past; your day is over. Violence has no place at the table of democracy; and no role in the future of this land.'"

Those words were applauded by everyone, yet they have easily been forgotten by the Irish Government. We all know that the Irish Government are beset by all sorts of internal problems, but it does not take a great deal—irrespective of one's personal problems—to display decency and honour when dealing with other people. That has not been evident.

In the Bill, we see a manifestation of the resolve not just of the Government but of this House and this land to deal with the problem created by a minority who would use violence for political ends. Whether IRA-Sinn Fein co-operates or not, the Bill will provide a springboard to enable us to launch our counter-propaganda and public relations throughout the entire world. One does not create legislation or set up an international commission on disarmament and verification unless there is a real and tangible problem. For that reason, I welcome the Bill.

I conclude with the words of someone who may not be known to everyone in the House, but who is known to most people in Northern Ireland—a gentleman called Father Denis Faul. In summing up what we are facing from IRA-Sinn Fein, he said,

> "Whatever happens . . . the militant side of Nationalism never intends to compromise on its demand for a United Ireland."

[Mr. Maginnis]

He went on to warn that

"these Nationalists are convinced that their aspiration will never be realised through the democratic process—

and it cannot be—

but only through violence."

Finally, he warned that

"the Provisional IRA is determined that this outcome will, and can only, be achieved through them."

I leave the House with the words of that good public figure, who has stood firm against terrorism within both traditions. These words should be remembered, and they will convince everyone who is genuinely involved in the search for peace that we in this House must put in place every possible device to frustrate the intentions of these evil men.

7.35 pm

Rev. William McCrea (Mid–Ulster): In this important debate, I once again express my appreciation, and that of my colleagues in the Democratic Unionist party, to the members of the security forces who have stood resolutely against terrorism over the many years that terrorists have imposed their onslaught of violence, terror, murder and destruction on our beloved Province and here on the mainland. I believe that they deserve our support.

I trust that the Government will always realise that they owe it to the people of Ulster to bring peace and stability to our Province and to see that terrorism is destroyed. I must confess that, at times, many people—including many members of the security forces—are dismayed because often, and especially since the so-called peace process commenced, there has been a softly-softly approach against the terrorists. Instead of terrorists being hunted down and brought to justice, no one now seems to be permitted to rock the boat.

It is interesting that in today's *Daily Telegraph*, Sean O'Callaghan—in admitting his part in IRA activities—said:

"I wanted to bring some of the godfathers down with me. I wasn't to know about the embryo peace process."

The report added:

"because behind-the-scenes talks were going on with IRA leaders, whom he was implicating, the evidence against them that he gave to the RUC was not even forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions."

That statement is worthy of serious consideration, and we need a reply from the Government.

There have been constant threats from those in the Sinn Fein movement who are supposed to be the political face of the IRA, although we know that they are one and the same. Mitchell McLaughlin said that, if the Prime Minister did not do or say certain things, there would be "lethal consequences". I have referred previously to a recent television programme on Martin McGuinness, one of the leading members of IRA-Sinn Fein. He is one of the leading members of the IRA, never mind Sinn Fein. The evidence produced by that programme, and the serious evidence given by those who lived under the terror of Martin McGuinness, must be tested in the courts, and I believe that the Government must not close their mind to that.

Sad to say, we are living in a time of constant violence. A newsletter this morning reported:

"A 16-year-old boy was strung upside down on railings and beaten by a gang of men until both his legs were broken.

The barbaric attack began with the youth being seized in an alleyway in the nationalist New Barnsley area of west Belfast late on Saturday night.

His legs were tied with tape and he was hung upside down from railings and both legs battered with clubs."

That violence against a 16-year-old boy was the responsibility of IRA-Sinn Fein, for which some people would try to apologise, and members of which hon. Members have even sought to bring into the Palace of Westminster to give them an acceptable face. The violence continues, and let no one suggest that the leopard has changed its spots, because IRA-Sinn Fein is the same corrupt organisation, the same bunch of murdering thugs, as it has always been.

The same article also says:

"In Londonderry, another 16-year-old was in hospital with head and arm injuries after being attacked and beaten . . .

A 22-year-old man was attacked in the Monagh Road area of west Belfast, by a gang of five men brandishing iron bars and claiming to be from the IRA. He was taken to hospital suffering from cuts to the head and upper body and bruises to the body and the arms . . .

A 20-year-old woman was punched in the face, dragged from her bed and thrown into another bedroom where her two-year-old daughter was sleeping.

The men then beat her 27-year-old partner about the head and body with a hammer."

That was the report this morning; that is the up-to-date news on those so-called converted terrorists. That is the bunch of thugs that we as parliamentarians are asked to sit down with and to accept as part of a democratic process.

The reality is that violence in Ulster continues unabated. We talk about decommissioning, but there is no decommissioning of the mind-set of those thugs and murderers. Let us not talk about mindless violence, because there was a purpose behind every act of those who perpetrated that barbarity. They want to hold our community under the heel of terror.

When we talk about the need for another ceasefire, we should realise that a ceasefire means only a cessation of firing. People say that, after the members of the IRA or any other paramilitary organisation have stopped firing their guns, they are to be accepted as democrats. Democracy does not permit people to hold an arsenal of weaponry that can bring destruction upon a civilised community. The process of destroying illegal weapons in Northern Ireland is based on the recognition that groups that claim to be committed to peace and democracy do not need weapons of murder and destruction.

It is easy for people to put their tongue in their cheek, smile from the side of their mouth and say that they have renounced violence. The only proof of the pie will be in the eating, and the only way in which those people, or any organisation, can prove that they have renounced violence—that there is a permanent end, not only a cessation—is by surrendering their weapons of war, terror and destruction. No democrat needs an illegal arsenal at his disposal.

No group that calls itself democratic has a right to the name if it makes threats, as Mitchell McLaughlin did, of lethal consequences if the Prime Minister does not say the right thing. That is a threat of further violence, and

Mitchell McLaughlin is not the only one to have made such a suggestion. Sinn Fein-IRA has constantly held the threat of violence over the heads of the people and the Government of the United Kingdom.

When there was an IRA ceasefire in 1994, the Prime Minister said that he had to be sure that it was permanent before civil servants could begin exploratory talks with Sinn Fein, and he rightly requested that those involved in terrorist activity would openly state the permanency of the end of violence. Of course, we know that IRA-Sinn Fein was unwilling to make such a statement.

The Prime Minister then weakened his demand, and said that the IRA need not use the word "permanent", but could use any group of words that meant that violence was over for all time and under all circumstances. As we all know, Sinn Fein-IRA remained tight-lipped, and waited for Dublin and America to act dutifully and pressurise the Government into capitulation once again, so the demand was even further weakened.

The Prime Minister then came over to Northern Ireland and suggested that he had a working assumption that violence had ended. On the basis of that working assumption, what happened? The protection of the people of Northern Ireland was relaxed and put off guard, and a tranche of 100 concessions was offered. The Government printed all the concessions in a book, so that the whole world would know about them.

It is amazing that, on the basis of a working assumption, with all the cuts that were going on, no expense was spared in printing the book and telling the world about the 100 concessions. The IRA pocketed every concession and reached out its begging bowl, knowing from what had happened throughout the process that, having got some, it could get more.

The ceasefire was not a permanent end to, or a renunciation of, violence. I am glad that the Prime Minister admitted that fact in an interview this weekend. Talking about the pressure for a new ceasefire, he said:

"What I do not wish to see would be a phoney ceasefire, a ceasefire simply to score public relations victories and to try and have Sinn Fein parachuted into the talks without actually giving up the violence that has sustained the IRA for so long. I'm not interested in a phoney ceasefire. In retrospect we had a phoney ceasefire; we thought we had a real one, and what did we subsequently find out? We subsequently found out that within days of declaring the ceasefire Sinn Fein/IRA were filling garages in London with semtex and explosives. That's not a genuine ceasefire."

The Prime Minister said that this time we must ensure that

"they're not targeting people, they're not buying arms; they're not preparing to go back to violence. And when I'm satisfied there is such a ceasefire, a genuine ceasefire, and it looks as though it is going to be sustainable, and I will not wait for too long to see if it is to be sustainable."

The Prime Minister acknowledges that those of us who live in the Province and live day by day with the reality of the threat of terrorism know exactly what it is to have our families and friends constantly under threat from the murder gangs of the IRA. We know what it is to be continually targeted by the terrorists; we know what it is to realise that there are people out to destroy our families; in short, we know that the IRA has not changed. It has not been deflected from its path of war, nor have its members changed their hearts and moved to the pathway of peace.

This is why we believe that all illegally held terrorist weapons must be handed in and destroyed. What is more, the terrorists' organisational machine must be completely dismantled. The killing machine is still intact; none of the sinews of war has been disabled. The fact is that punishment beatings, intimidation, racketeering, targeting and recruiting continue. What is needed is the defeat of armed terrorists, not an accommodation with them.

I remember when the Prime Minister and Albert Reynolds jointly issued the Downing street declaration, laying down their conditions for all-party talks. The Prime Minister elaborated on the meaning of the declaration's reference to parties committed to "exclusively peaceful means":

"The IRA would have to hand in its huge arsenal of weapons,"

he said. At the time, that was the British Government's standard. Four months later, the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) reinforced that idea, when he said that no guns could be on the table, under the table or outside the door.

It would seem that the people who made those commitments have very short memories. Only shortly afterwards, the British Government were willing to accept the token destruction of some weapons. Indeed, Albert Reynolds, the then Prime Minister of the Irish Republic, claimed that weapons were never even mentioned in the discussions, and formed no part of the Downing street declaration.

Make no mistake: the issue will have to be dealt with. If Sinn Fein negotiators were allowed into the talks backed by IRA guns, they would resort to the threat of violence if those talks did not go their way. They would have no qualms about leaving bodies scattered across the countryside—just as they have done through all these years.

The article by Sean O'Callaghan to which I referred said that what stirred him up more than anything else was when a woman was blown up by a bomb that he had set, and his IRA quartermaster asked him whether the woman had been pregnant. That, he said, would mean that two Prods had been killed for the price of one bomb. That was what really made him wonder what kind of an organisation he was working for.

As long as the IRA remains in existence and retains one bullet or one ounce of Semtex, I do not think Unionists can ever trust their commitment to the democratic process. Let us therefore not look for a gesture or a fudge on this issue. We require the absolute and total surrender of illegal weapons. If the British Government were to stand by their original commitment, they would require the very same.

My party will not oppose the Bill, but we do believe that there will be peace only when the weapons of war are finally removed from the hands of the murderers on the streets of Ulster. There is no place in a democracy for people with illegal weapons at their disposal with which they can threaten democrats who do not agree with them.

The Government owe it to the people of the United Kingdom to rid our country of the scourge of terrorists, wherever they come from. That will leave the security forces as the only people with the right to protect the population of the United Kingdom. I salute the bravery of our security forces, and I ask the Government to untie their hands and permit them to go after the terrorists and bring them to justice.

7.54 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I apologise for missing the opening speeches. I was at a meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee in Hamilton, after which there were delays at Glasgow airport.

[Mr. Dennis Canavan]

I trust that both sides of the House are in agreement on the need to bring about an unequivocal ceasefire that will lead to all-party talks and decommissioning—and, I hope, the development of a permanent and peaceful settlement. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) for all the hard work he has done in that respect, and I again urge Sinn Fein to try to persuade the IRA to bring about the unequivocal ceasefire that will allow Sinn Fein to enter the all-party talks.

I believe that the British Government should face up to their responsibilities. They could and should do much more to encourage the restoration of a ceasefire. The Government must learn from their past mistakes. The last ceasefire was a missed opportunity because of a series of protracted delays, first over clarification, then over permanence and then over decommissioning. There were great hopes that the Mitchell commission would break the deadlock on decommissioning, but when the commission came out with its report, the British Government put up another hurdle by insisting on further elections as a precondition for talks.

It was unjustifiable and deplorable on the part of the IRA to resume hostilities which led to the deaths and injuries of innocent people. I pay tribute to the former paramilitaries on the loyalist side who have managed to maintain their ceasefire; I hope that it continues. I note, however, that at least one person who was closely associated with one of the minor loyalist parties to the talks was involved in a trial at the High Court in Scotland and found guilty of an arms-related offence. But that did not disqualify his party from participation in the talks. I am not arguing that it should have done; I think that the talks should be all-inclusive, and that the British Government should be even-handed and consistent.

The delivery of an unequivocal ceasefire, and signing up to the Mitchell principles, should be the only preconditions for admission to the talks. No more hurdles must be put in the way of Sinn Fein or any other party. Mitchell proposed that the parties consider a compromise under which some decommissioning would take place during the process of all-party negotiations, instead of before or after. That seems a sensible compromise, which should allow Sinn Fein to enter all-party talks soon, after an unequivocal ceasefire is declared.

The Government could and should encourage such a ceasefire by announcing a timetable for entering the talks, instead of putting up more hurdles as outlined in the Prime Minister's statement of 28 November.

Another lesson that can be learned from the previous ceasefire is that the peace process has a better chance of developing when the British and Irish Governments work in harmony and speak with one voice.

I sense that, in recent weeks, the British Government have been listening more to the voice of the Ulster Unionists than to the voice of the Irish Government. I do not criticise them for listening to Ulster Unionists, who must be brought into the whole process, but the fact that the Government have apparently given more credence to them than to the Irish Government in recent weeks may have more to do with the arithmetical composition of the House than a genuine desire to develop the peace process.

I therefore appeal to the Prime Minister and the Minister of State: the Government's days are clearly numbered; this may be the Government's last chance; why not take a risk for the sake of peace? It would be a tragedy if another opportunity were lost, simply because the Government wanted to buy a few more votes and a few more months in power. The cause of peace is much more important than that.

8 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): I have been present, on and off, for most of the debate and have listened carefully to what has been said, not only by the Secretary of State and the Opposition spokesman but by several late arrivals. I assure the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) that he was not the only hon. Member to have been delayed by the weather. Some of my colleagues were similarly held back. Indeed, we have all had some form of travel difficulty today.

I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), who talked of nationalist concerns over Drumcree. I find it amazing that all that I ever hear about Drumcree is that nationalist fears have resulted from it. No one seems prepared to consider that the Unionists might also have fears over Drumcree, Bellaghye and the boycotts that people have suffered. That seems to have been quietly swept under the carpet.

While the hon. Lady and other hon. Members are not unwilling to accept that the IRA has been the most active ingredient in promoting those confrontations on the streets, they seem to accept that those groups who call themselves "concerned residents" really represent the community and they would amount to nothing, were they not backed up by thugs with iron bars and balaclavas.

There is also a great willingness on behalf of the RUC to deal with the obstruction of legal processions. I remind Front-Bench Members on both sides of the House that the legislation under which we now operate was originally introduced to restrict traditional processions in Northern Ireland. At the same time, however, it re-enacted legislation relating to the obstruction of legal processions. If the police paid more attention to that and less attention to the obstructionists' howls, many of the problems that have been encountered might have been avoided.

I have difficulty with the fact that Unionists and members of the Loyalist institutions are asked to negotiate with those people. The perception of the Unionist population is fairly clear and accurate; it is being asked to negotiate with those opposed to the Union—those whom they perceive, to put it mildly, to support violence and terror—and ask them for permission to walk down the road. Once the people of Great Britain understand that that is what is happening, much of the violence in Northern Ireland over the past couple of years and the reasons for it become clear.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and the hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney), who have both left the Chamber, talked about the psyche of the IRA. The IRA and its fellow travellers object to the police because they try to ensure that the Queen's writ runs. They object to the present situation in the prisons because they call those thugs and murderers who are properly given long sentences "prisoners of war"..

Both the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North and the hon. and learned Member for North Down are as well aware as I am that if the IRA, Sinn Fein and violent republicans in general ever admitted to themselves that

they were guilty of murder, rather than of killing someone in armed combat in legitimate battle; if they ever admitted to themselves that they were thugs rather than people imposing their authority on the population like some sort of thuggish police force; and if they admitted that their acts were illegal, their whole world would collapse. They could no longer rationalise the murders, the violence, the bombing and the intimidation of which they are guilty. It is to protect themselves that they claim that they are POWs. It is to protect their own mental stability—some of them have it—that they maintain that they are the legal descendants of old Sinn Fein and, even before that, of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. None of that has any legitimacy. They have been nothing but thugs and murderers from day one.

The hon. Members for Redcar and for Falkirk, West said that the two Governments working together had made progress. The hon. Lady cited the Anglo-Irish agreement and the framework document. My view is simple. I must ask: progress to what and to where? Progress implies that one has moved from one position to another. We all know perfectly well that the IRA is interested not so much in political power as constitutional change, which diminishes the United Kingdom and takes us ever closer to a united Ireland. If the hon. Lady and those who think like her call that political progress, they are failing in their duty as spokesmen for any major or even minor party in this House. The duty of all hon. Members is to maintain the United Kingdom and those who fail to do that add to rather than diminish the violence and horrors of Northern Ireland.

I was puzzled by the sheer blatant stupidity of what took place in Harryville in Ballymena. Over the weekend I began to wonder what was really going on and whether, rather than being stupid, there might be a deeper and more sinister motive behind that whole affair; a motive that may not have been there from the start but may have developed over recent weeks.

I commend the hon. Member for Redcar for taking up and supporting the Prime Minister's statement yesterday that the IRA will have to show by actions, not words, that violence has finished.

The Secretary of State said that this is an enabling Bill. Thankfully, he translated the word, "modalities" for us. I was glad of that but sorry that he did not translate exactly what "decommissioning" meant. That, however, has become clear as the debate has developed. I was interested that individuals will not be exposed to prosecution over the surrender of weapons. I looked with a rather jaundiced eye at that part of the Bill—clause 6—and I was surprised that it will take up to five years to convince those people that they must give up their weaponry.

Like one or two others, I must voice my abiding concerns about clause 6, which prohibits testing. It prohibits ballistic tests or any tests that might identify a weapon that was used in terrorist crime. Let us be clear about the sort of crimes in question. We are not speaking about someone who went out and shot his neighbour's pet rabbit or pigeon. We are speaking about guns that were used to murder people, to try to murder people, to rob banks or to intimidate. We are told that they will not be examined, and that evidence that might be gleaned from them will not be used to secure the conviction of a murderer.

Is that acceptable to the House? Is it acceptable to the chief constables in Great Britain, or are they not prepared to accept that aspect of the Bill, because they want to solve the murders and put the murderers away? That is exactly what the people in Northern Ireland want. I hope that the Government of the Irish Republic want it too. Some of the weapons were used to murder members of the Civic Guard and to commit other murders in the Irish Republic. I hope that the Government have the desire and the will to ensure that those who committed murders in that jurisdiction pay the price for their crimes.

We know that the legislation passed in this House must be the same as the legislation passed in the Dail, so the Bill cannot be changed. It will be pushed through. If the legislation is not the same, there is no way that a cross-border body can deal with the surrender of weapons. That is what decommissioning means, although it is not popular to state it as baldly as that—it might annoy members of the IRA, I suppose, but I am not concerned whether they are annoyed or not, because I do not believe that they will give up any of their weapons anyway. If the legislation is to be enforced, it must be the same on both sides of the border. We may object, but not a jot or tittle, other than little problems of punctuation that may turn up, will be corrected. If the Irish Republic is not prepared to make the same corrections in its legislation, presumably they will not be made in ours either.

I hope that as the passage of the legislation proceeds, the Government and those in the Dail who may want to question their legislation, will consider why we will refuse to use information that might put another murderer in prison, where he properly belongs.

Let us be honest. If the Bill is not passed, there is no framework. It is therefore vital for the Bill to be passed, to create the framework, although as the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) said, it is likely to remain unused. Nevertheless, we want it, so that there is a framework to enable weapons to be cleared if, by some unbelievable sequence of events, we ever get to that stage.

Whenever the weapons are cleared, decommissioned or surrendered, and members of the IRA come to talks, they will be faced with a question that they have yet to answer positively: do they accept the principle of consent? Do they accept the right of the people of Northern Ireland to say "No, we are not going to have a united Ireland. No, we don't want the cross-border institutions so beloved of Members on both Front Benches. No, we will not be ruled in a way that takes us out of the United Kingdom, in the short or the long term"? Will the IRA sign up to that? What is the evidence that it ever will?

Surely that evidence was set out elsewhere. It was made clear earlier this year, when the IRA refused to sign up to the reports of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin, on that very issue. Every other nationalist party, every other republican party and other odds and sods from elsewhere in the island of Ireland signed up to it. If members of the IRA could not sign up in those circumstances, they will not sign up to anything that would be acceptable to anyone but themselves. The plain truth is that the IRA has no intention of signing up to the principle of consent, now or ever. That would be such a psychological blow to the IRA that it could not come to terms with it.

Similar problems apply to the time scale. We are told that there must be a time scale, but that must be related to the actions of Sinn Fein and whether or not the

[Mr. William Ross]

conditions that allow talks to start are met. Because of the problems of the IRA ever meeting those conditions, no time scale is possible. The time scale is a red herring put out by the IRA to get itself into the talks on its terms, not on the terms set down by Mitchell, the Governments or anyone else.

The record shows that where there is no disarmament when dealing with an organisation such as the IRA, civil war will resume at some point. It may resume, as it did in Angola and Cambodia after the elections, or in Northern Ireland's case it may resume when the talks are completed, before we reach the elections, but resume it certainly will, if the IRA does not get its way. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) told us that decommissioning should be addressed before anyone left the table. I fear that that is pie in the sky. We must ask ourselves what will happen when the IRA refuses to accept the result of talks, if by some strange chance we ever got that far.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh expressed his regrets that the IRA had not been defeated by the security forces. At some point we will return to that issue. It will come down to the IRA having to be defeated by the security forces. I am sorry to have to say that to the House, but it has been my view throughout my life.

I have grown up among those people and known many of them as a boy, a youth and a man. As the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) knows, there were two incidents in my village fairly recently. I do not think that I misjudge or misread members of the IRA. I know how their thought processes work and I know the conclusions that they have reached. I know what I am up against. I wish that others, not only in this House but throughout the world, would accept the reality of the situation, rather than the airy fairy nonsense that so many of them accept as reality.

8.18 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): As the House will have gathered, the Opposition support the approach to decommissioning that was embodied in the Mitchell report. Therefore, as the Bill stems from the report and its recommendations, we support the Bill.

The compromise envisages some decommissioning taking place during the process of the talks. We believe—as do the Government—that decommissioning will help to build the trust and confidence necessary for a better future in Northern Ireland. Decommissioning is enormously important in upholding the rule of law and underpinning the peace process by providing an assurance that any future problems will be solved by democratic means.

As the Secretary of State said at the beginning of the debate, decommissioning must suggest neither victory nor defeat: it must be accomplished to the satisfaction of an independent commission and it must result in the complete destruction of armaments. It must be fully verifiable; it must not expose individuals to prosecution and it must be mutual. We embrace those principles and we also seek those goals. We believe that this measure contributes to fulfilling Mitchell's intentions.

I have several questions regarding the detail of the Bill which the Minister may deal with in his winding-up speech, through correspondence or in Committee. Hon. Members have referred to those issues during the debate, but they are important and it would assist us if the information could be provided before the Bill goes to Committee. The first point was raised by the hon. Members for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) and for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross). I ask the Minister to clarify the Republic of Ireland's position vis-a-vis decommissioning.

We do not associate ourselves with the negative remarks on that subject as we believe that the Republic has been very steadfast and remains deeply committed to the process. However, it is known that a large quantity of the munitions involved is held in the Republic—that fact is not disputed. When talking about decommissioning, it would be fanciful to imagine that the former terrorists would bring their armaments across the border into Northern Ireland. Therefore, the Republic's actions are very important.

On 29 October, the Minister of Justice for Ireland referred to a commitment by both Governments to publish draft enabling legislation and to introduce that legislation in respective Parliaments in the current Session so that the legislative framework would be enacted by Christmas. In the same speech, the Minister of Justice said that there had been considerable discussion with the Northern Ireland Office as there is a recognised need for a co-ordinated response and the implementation of complementary arrangements in relation to the stock of illegally held weapons. The Northern Ireland justice Minister went on to say that the Bills differed in some respects. Perhaps the Minister will explain in what respect they are different and how that affects the Bill. Although they may be only technical divergences, it may assist the Committee to know how the Bills differ.

Secondly, will the Minister explain the thinking behind section 8? How does he expect it to operate? The section refers to the Act's implications in England, Wales and Scotland. Some hon. Members have referred to that issue during the debate and we need some details about how the relevant jurisdictions will implement the legislation. It would be helpful if the Minister could respond tonight or have those details ready for Committee.

The third issue was referred to by many hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). It is probably unfortunate that we are in the habit of using the word "amnesty" in relation to the legislation. To my mind, "amnesty" implies that people have been forgiven or let off in some way for crimes that they have committed. However, as I read it, the Bill provides an amnesty not for the person but for the weapon. Evidence regarding the weapon can never be used, but if other evidence is produced to implicate someone in a crime—if, for example, two people come forward and say "We saw this person commit the crime"—that person is just as likely to be prosecuted in future. I listened to the speech by the hon. Member for Basingstoke and I do not think that he fully appreciates that point.

Mr. Hunter: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a distinction between not using the forensic evidence and not obtaining it? If forensic evidence is obtained, it may eliminate many hours of police work.

Mr. Worthington: I appreciate the difference. However, the hon. Gentleman must recognise that we

have an amnesty for weapons in order to assure people that the evidence collected from the weapons will not be used against them in the future. If there is decommissioning and if there is the slightest suspicion that evidence from a weapon may be used against a person in the future, we can forget about that scheme.

Mr. McNamara: Does my hon. Friend agree that the statement by the hon. Member for Basingstoke is based upon a misapprehension? He assumes that the international commission will surrender arms or that arms surrendered will go to either the Garda Siochana or the Royal Ulster Constabulary. We are concerned about the destruction of arms and explosives and the verification of that, not about the people who will destroy them.

Mr. Worthington: I accept my hon. Friend's comments. I do not think that any hon. Member has referred to my fourth issue. Will the Minister explain what is meant in section 7(2)(c) of the Bill which refers to conferring:

"on members and servants of the Commission and members of their families who form part of their households, in such cases, to such extent and with such modifications as the order may specify any of the privileges and immunities set down in Parts II, III and V of that Schedule".

What does that mean? What safeguards are provided? Does the section refer to some kind of diplomatic immunity? I would be grateful for the Minister's clarification of that.

My fifth point regarding the Bill was also raised by the hon. Members for Upper Bann and for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis). What action will immediately follow the enactment of the Bill? In his statement on 30 October, the Secretary of State said it would be desirable to set up a committee of the plenary session talks to work out the precise role of the international commission proposed in the report by the international body. He spoke of the need to equip such a committee with a body of experts to work up the alternative approaches to decommissioning referred to by the international body. When the Bill passes through the House and the other place there will be no hiatus but will there be immediate action in that respect?

We want to assure the people of Northern Ireland that decommissioning means the end of violence without simultaneously insisting on total prior decommissioning which may erect a barrier to substantive talks that could bring about the desired decommissioning. It is ironic that the more barriers to talks one erects through insisting on total decommissioning, the less likely it is that decommissioning will occur at some future stage. The Mitchell report was commissioned to assist us in that regard and it produced a recommendation, which we have embraced.

The IRA and Sinn Fein are being incredibly disingenuous if they do not see that it becomes impossible for their opponents to accept the genuineness of talks if, simultaneously, activities take place that undermine the talks for which Sinn Fein has clamoured. Sinn Fein must know that there is a strong suspicion—it was more than a suspicion, according to the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson)—that the tactic of Sinn Fein-IRA is consecutively to use talks and violence. Confidence was very much destroyed by Canary wharf, Manchester, Thiepval and Osnabrück. IRA-Sinn Fein must realise that such is the atmosphere of mistrust that it will have no one to talk to unless there is evidence of its bona fides, and unless there is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam) said, action as well as words.

If at the same time as talks, people and places are targeted, that would be inimical to the talks process. If at the same time as talks, or preparation for talks, there is paramilitary training, that would be inimical to the peace process. If at the same time as talks, or preparation for talks, there are punishment beatings and intimidation, that would be inimical to the talks process. If at the same time as talks there are boycotts of totally legitimate businesses that happen to be owned by the other side, that would also be inimical to the talks process.

All those activities raise question marks about the genuine intention of those seeking all-party talks. Such activities are utterly destructive to the chance of progress because they are destructive to the trust that is necessary. On the other side, if every tactic is used to prevent talks progressing to substantive issues, that is also destructive behaviour. All of us who advocate the democratic process have to prove that it works. We have to show that progress is possible. To sit at the talks table and put verbal obstacles to progress is to be destructive of a peaceful future. The issue of trust is key to this.

There are many confidence-building measures that can and must be used. There is a heavy responsibility on all of us. The Prime Minister made a key statement on 24 January this year, when he said:

"The Government believe that such an elective process offers a viable alternative direct route to the confidence necessary to bring about all-party negotiations."

That statement was backed by many hon. Members. He continued:

"In that context, it is possible to imagine decommissioning and such negotiations being taken forward in parallel."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1996; Vol. 270, c. 354.]

There is a heavy responsibility on those who urged that the electoral process offered a way forward to all-party talks to demonstrate that it can work.

Decommissioning is a two-way street. It is likely to occur only if we can show that the democratic process on offer is genuine. Decommissioning is most likely to occur, therefore, if it looks as though the talks are working.

As we debate the Bill to provide the mechanism for decommissioning, we must continue to support the talks process. There is a heavy realisation that the talks may become comatose because of the approaching general election. That must not happen, because that lack of progress has its own big dangers.

For our part, we will, as we always have, continue to support the Government through the Bill while we believe that they are genuinely seeking to move forward to all-party talks and a peaceful resolution.

8.33 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): I am particularly glad to follow the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), and I welcome his concluding remarks. I shall return to some of his points.

I thank all hon. Members who took part in the debate for their wide-ranging support for the Government's proposals in the Bill. A number of points were raised,

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and I shall seek to deal with them during my remarks, but I hope that hon. Members will forgive me if I do not specifically refer to them on each occasion.

I welcome the support given to the Government's proposal by the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), speaking on behalf of Her Majesty's Opposition. I shall touch on some of the issues in the clauses that she raised.

The hon. Lady referred to the importance of the review carried out by Dr. Peter North. I particularly welcome her remarks on that matter. We shall look at what Dr. North recommends when his report is made available to the Government in a week or so. We shall look in particular at what recommendations are capable of negotiation and agreement between all concerned so that we can avoid a repeat of the Drumcree situation this year.

Mr. McNamara: I thought that Dr. North's report was due in January, not in a fortnight's time.

Sir John Wheeler: I said in a few weeks' time. The end of January is, alas, but a few weeks away.

Ms Mowlam: I apologise for pressing this point, but if the Minister is suggesting that the report will be ready any earlier than two weeks, it is very important to get it into the public domain and for the Northern Ireland parties to discuss it as soon as possible, because it is important to build a coalition of support around them.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam) *indicated dissent.*

Ms Mowlam: The hon. Lady shakes her head, but to me "a few" means two or three weeks; the end of January is six weeks away.

I do not want to push the Minister unreasonably, but it is an important report.

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. I used the word "few". Others may have misheard and believed that I was referring to two. I understand that the report will be available at the end of January. I look forward to receiving it and to considering its recommendations at that time.

The hon. Member for Redcar also referred to the events at Ballymena and to the courage of the mayor, Councillor Curry, and others, who demonstrated beyond any doubt the determination of all men of good will to stand out against the evil that is occurring there at the present time. I, too, salute the work of the mayor and others who sustained him during the past weekend.

The hon. Lady raised a number of questions about clauses. On clause 1(b), we have no specific additional provisions in mind. The methods of decommissioning identified in clause 3, which reflects Mitchell's recommendations, seem to cover all the most likely and realistic options. Nevertheless, the Government will wish to preserve maximum flexibility in case other possible ways to decommission illegal arms are identified. Clause 1 preserves that flexibility, which I think the House will agree is entirely sensible.

The hon. Lady raised a point about clause 4(2). The schedule contains a comprehensive list of offences that may be committed during decommissioning and to which the Government consider the amnesty should apply. The Government will include the power to amend the schedule as a precaution, should the need arise at some future stage to amend the list to add or remove offences or descriptions of offences—for example, should future changes to the firearms or explosives law add or remove relevant offences.

On clauses 3, 4, 5 and 6, the Government have in mind the situation where, having been decommissioned, an article is misappropriated and used to commit a crime. The Irish Government make similar provision in their Bill. For example, where a gun is handed over to a commission or designated person, it is regarded as having been decommissioned. If, having been handed over, it is stolen from storage prior to destruction and used to commit a crime, it is right that it should be available in evidence and that it should be forensically tested in relation to the alleged offence.

The hon. Lady asked whether the England, Wales and Scottish schemes under clause 8 would be radically different. The answer is no. Decommissioning schemes made under clause 8 will automatically attract the Bill's provisions, including the core amnesty, evidential and forensic testing restrictions. The detailed modalities of a decommissioning scheme in Great Britain may differ from a Northern Ireland scheme, depending on whether different circumstances applied at the time the scheme was made.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) also asked a question on that theme. Any weapon decommissioned under the scheme will be permanently unavailable for testing, whereas the life of the Bill is only five years. Therefore, the Bill's benefits have a permanent effect.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) also welcomed the Bill, and made a substantial speech in which he asked a number of questions.

Mr. William Ross: Before the right hon. Gentleman leaves the subject of decommissioning, may I say that I assume that the Government have thought of the possibility of stolen weapons turning up among those that are decommissioned? Will they be returned to their original owners?

Sir John Wheeler: The Government will want to contemplate that matter and make provision for that. No doubt the hon. Gentleman will pursue that issue in the Standing Committee, if he is privileged enough to be appointed to it; if not, I am sure that others will. I shall be pleased to consider what special arrangements can be made in those circumstances.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke raised a number of points on clause 6. He and others talked about testing and the serious effect on the investigation of crime. I contend that the exemption for testing would not necessarily preclude investigations of crime. Prosecutions are often mounted in the absence of the weapon used: other evidence of involvement in the crime often plays a more central role.

If evidence against an individual that was unconnected with the decommissioning process supported a prosecution, that evidence would be used and the

prosecution could take place. The important point to remember is that it is our aim in the Bill to persuade those in possession of unlawful armaments to decommission them. If they feel exposed, they will not participate, and the arms will not be handed over. The removal from society of illegal arms and Semtex is clearly in the public interest, but without clause 6 there would be no decommissioning.

I agree with the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie. The provisions of clause 6 apply to weapons: they do not apply to individuals. Individuals will continue to be pursued by the authorities to the utmost degree. It is the weapon or the Semtex that will be exempt under the provisions of the Bill.

Mr. Ross: I am sorry to keep interrupting the Minister, but he knows that all bullet-firing weapons in Northern Ireland that are held under firearms certificates are presently recorded—they are taken in, fired and a match is kept. The forensic laboratories of the security forces also have a record of all weapons that have been used in terrorist crime, because the bullets fired are recovered. If we do not examine the weapons that are handed in, we will never be sure that all those that have been used in terrorist crime have been handed in. It is a way of checking the honesty of the people with whom we are dealing.

Sir John Wheeler: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, which we should explore in Committee. If an amendment is tabled, the Committee will have to consider it; but we must not lose sight of the fact that the Bill's purpose is to set in train a decommissioning arrangement in the Republic of Ireland and in the United Kingdom so as to remove the stockpiles of illegally held weapons, Semtex, detonators and other munitions. If there comes a time when that is realistically expected, there must be the means to secure the delivery of those illegally held weapons. If we create a situation in which those who already hold illegal stocks of weapons will not play the game, we will lose out completely.

A judgment must be made. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the House finds it a distasteful judgment, as I do, but that is the reality of the problem with which the kernel of the Bill is trying to deal.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) made a number of key points in his speech, which I was glad to consider. He referred to the late arrival of some hon. Members. As someone who has travelled to and from Northern Ireland more than 300 times, I, too, am a victim of aircraft delays. The House will readily understand why some hon. Members were unable to be present.

The hon. Gentleman welcomed the Bill. He referred in particular to the commission's powers. My right hon. and learned Friend made it clear that the Her Majesty's Government and the Irish Government have accepted the international body's recommendation that decommissioning should be overseen by an independent commission. Such a commission should be established by international agreement, and could have conferred on it appropriate legal status, immunities and privileges under the Bill. I shall return in a moment to immunities.

The commission would be capable of operating independently in the United Kingdom and the Republic, and would enjoy appropriate legal status conferred by order. The eventual composition and size of the commission will depend on its role in the decommissioning scheme. What the Government expect it to do will, to a large extent, determine its membership and how it is staffed and otherwise resourced. The parties in the talks process are considering the commission's composition, role and terms of reference. The Bill intends to keep all options open. I hope that that will help and reassure the hon. Member for Upper Bann.

The Government have no fixed timetable for the establishment of a commission. We do not rule out its establishment prior to the start of decommissioning, so that it can act in an advisory capacity to the two Governments, as the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) said. The Government are committed to providing the necessary information and assistance to the commission to enable it to carry out its duties. We do not consider that the powers to search, to enter premises or to require the production of information are necessary or desirable, as we believe that decommissioning, once it occurs will—indeed, must—be voluntary and cannot be imposed.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann and others asked about the five-year limit. The overall time limit of five years has no particular significance. It does not mean that we expect the decommissioning process to last five years, although the possibility that it will cannot be discounted. We recognise that the decommissioning process may extend beyond the two-year period set aside for talks. We are, for example, looking for the decommissioning of all illegal arms, including those in the possession of groups that are not party to the talks process. I am thinking of organisations such as the Irish National Liberation Army and Republican Sinn Fein and, perhaps, others. If, as we all hope, decommissioning has been completed before the end of the five-year period, no subsequent order extending the maximum duration of the amnesty will be necessary.

The hon. Gentleman also raised points about entry conditions. If there were to be a new ceasefire, we should need to take great care in assessing whether it was indeed unequivocal. In the making of that assessment, account would have to be taken of all the circumstances, including events on the ground. Reference has been made in the debate to some of those. For example, is targeting still going on? Are the terrorist gangs still fully equipped and preparing to mount operations? Are punishment beatings going on, and who is responsible for them? All the events that have been mentioned in today's debate would form part of the judgment that Her Majesty's Government would have to make.

Mr. McNamara: If that is the case—no one would disagree with what the Minister said about all the issues that he has mentioned—why can he not say, "If you declare a ceasefire at such a time, provided that those matters are dealt with, we will then allow you to enter the talks"?

Sir John Wheeler: If the Provisional IRA-Sinn Fein were to make an announcement in clear, unequivocal terms, and follow up its statement and its language with clear action on the ground—by, for example, giving an instruction to stand down the so-called active service units—and if the evidence were so plain that no Member of Parliament, including those present this evening, doubted the reality of the position, it would be

[Sir John Wheeler]

comparatively easy for Sinn Fein to enter the talks process. If that were not the case, however, Her Majesty's Government would be obliged to take into account those circumstances, to look at events on the ground and to make a judgment. That is an inescapable burden that falls on the Government—a burden that the Government will not shirk.

In saying that, I make it clear to the House that the Government are not attempting to erect barriers to Sinn Fein's entry into the talks process. We want an inclusive process. But if that process is to succeed, and if other parties to the talks are to remain in the same room, what Sinn Fein says must be absolutely true and beyond any question of doubt. I hope that I have made our position clear.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) also raised the question—as he just did in his intervention—of Sinn Fein's entry into the talks. As I have made clear, and as the Government have made clear on many occasions, the exclusion from the present talks process is a self-exclusion. It could end today. It is in the hands of the Provisional IRA-Sinn Fein to take the action that would command confidence and permit it to enter the process: that is entirely a matter for it.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Minister used the word "action". He will recognise that there was a time when members of the IRA would never deny their membership. They changed that, and were prepared to challenge it at the time Daithi O'Connell was brought before the courts in Dublin. Does the Minister accept that words are not enough to convince the people of Northern Ireland that they are genuine? References to a "resumed ceasefire" or to the "restoration of a ceasefire" are not enough either. That is not the ceasefire that the people of Northern Ireland want, because it was never real or genuine.

Sir John Wheeler: The hon. Gentleman is right. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said that the previous ceasefire, which we all welcomed, was nevertheless fraudulent: it did not deliver the integrity that the House, the public and parties in Northern Ireland sought. We cannot make that mistake again. If there is to be another ceasefire, it must be genuine, and perceived to be genuine by all who have an interest in the process; otherwise it will not work.

The hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) also raised points about the scheme. The Government intend the scheme, or schemes, to be appropriate to Great Britain, taking into account the different circumstances that may apply in the two separate jurisdictions—England and Wales, and Scotland.

The hon. Gentleman asked about details of the scheme. Work on ways in which decommissioning take place in practice is certainly in hand, but it is not possible at this stage to finalise the detailed arrangements. Those are also matters in which the parties to the talks will have an interest. I can say, however, that the ways will encompass one or more of the decommissioning methods set out in paragraph 44 of the report of the international body.

I very much hope and expect that all parties in Northern Ireland will have the opportunity to examine any decommissioning schemes in draft. The House will also have the opportunity to scrutinise both the content and the length of such schemes at regular intervals. That is the purpose of clause 2, and the intention behind it.

The hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) asked about the relevance of the Mitchell report following the events of 9 February. The Government's view is that the only basis on which the process can move forward to a position in which decommissioning is actually likely to occur is the compromise favoured by the international body, providing for some decommissioning during the negotiations. I recognise the sincerely and strongly held reservations of principle expressed by many hon. Members about aspects of this, but unless we can move the process forward under the Mitchell proposals, no progress will be made.

The hon. Member for Mid–Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) referred to the 100 concessions, to use his words. They were not concessions. They were moves, during the ceasefire period, towards normality. The Government made them in response to the decreased security threat, as was then the case. No one in Northern Ireland wants to live with all the security arrangements that then existed, but, in the wake of the resumption of violence, and under the advice of the Chief Constable, the Government have reversed some of those relaxations. We will take no risks with the security of people in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Gentleman also raised "The Cook Report" television programme and the involvement of Mr. Martin McGuinness. Any evidence that comes to the notice of the authorities will be properly examined, but it is for the independent Director of Public Prosecutions to decide whether there is a case to take before the courts. There is no lack of willingness, however, to investigate such cases, if the evidence is there.

In Committee, we will consider in more detail the points raised by the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie. I think that I have answered some of them already, but the timing of the introduction of the Irish Bill is a matter for the Irish Government. I have no reason to believe, however, that their earlier intention to introduce their Bill shortly does not still stand. Both Governments have worked closely together to prepare legislation that is entirely complementary.

In the past few weeks, that detailed work has continued. The need for the two Bills to match each other closely has required the Irish side to take account of certain late changes to our Bill. They refer in particular to including Great Britain within the Bill's scope. The scheme in the Republic of Ireland requires a form of regulation that we do not need to have in our Bill, so there are those minor differences in the arrangements.

Ms Mowlam: I appreciate the Minister giving way. In terms of timing, would the Minister help to clarify an earlier intervention? Would it be possible for him to give a commitment that the publication of the North committee report will be timed with a statement in the House, so that the House can respond to the report immediately?

Sir John Wheeler: I cannot predict what the business managers may be willing to agree to at the end of January. I will, of course, take note of the hon. Lady's suggestion about a statement. She would agree, however, that it is important that, once it is available, the report should be carefully considered. If there is a need for any legislative

changes, the House would want to consider those at the earliest practicable opportunity. To that extent, I acknowledge the hon. Lady's concern.

Mr. Trimble: I appreciate the Minister's caution about promising statements to the House, because I am sure that the business managers of the House would have an interest in that. I notice, however, that the Northern Ireland Office rarely makes statements to the House and that there are oodles of matters on which it should, including its statement tomorrow morning in Stormont—a place where we will not be.

Be that as it may, will the Minister give an undertaking that, as soon as he receives the North committee report, it will be published so that all parties in the House and the whole community in Northern Ireland can react to it and so that we have proper consultation before the legislation?

Sir John Wheeler: I will of course take into account the hon. Gentleman's advice and find out what can be done to meet his objectives.

I hope that I have dealt with some of the points of hon. Members. I look forward to pursuing those points in further detail in Standing Committee next week, when I hope we shall be able to make speedy progress with the Bill, which has received widespread support from the House as a whole.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

NORTHERN IRELAND ARMS DECOMMISSIONING BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 50A(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses incurred by the Secretary of State—

(a) in connection with a scheme for the decommissioning of firearms, ammunition and explosives, or

(b) in making payments to or in connection with a Commission established to facilitate decommissioning—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

CONTRACT (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 94E (Scottish Grand Committee (bills in relation to their principle)),

That the Bill be committed to a Scottish Standing Committee—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made. and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

Air Carrier Liability

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 523196, relating to air carrier liability in case of accidents, and endorses the Government's proposed approach to negotiations on the draft Regulation in the Council.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

Protection against Third Country Legislation

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 957396, relating to the protection of Community interests against third country legislation, and endorses the Government's decision to agree at the General Affairs Council on 28th October to the adoption of a European Community Regulation providing such protection.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

Question agreed to.

Policing the Streets

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Bates.]*

9.4 pm

Mr. Chris Davies (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Earlier this year, two important reports were published that considered the effectiveness of police patrolling and the work of the bobby on the beat: the Audit Commission's "Streetwise" report, and the Police Federation's "Patrolling" report. Each made practical suggestions for improving police performance. I am grateful for the opportunity today to raise those and some other points. My remarks are intended to address national concerns, but I shall include some local examples to illustrate my points.

The public hold in the highest regard police patrol officers and the bobby on the beat, and I believe that they are right to do so. I, too, want more officers to be working the streets and for them to do so more effectively—working to clear objectives, with better training, more responsibility and enhanced status. Such improvements would be to the benefit of our communities.

The watchword today is "intelligence-led policing", and performance criteria stress the number of arrests being made by police officers. So the question is, "Is there really a role for officers on patrol, and especially on foot patrol?" My answer to the question, very firmly, is yes. The work of patrol officers is not simply about detecting crime: it is about maintaining order and tranquillity within a community. Too much emphasis on crime-fighting leads to a one-sided view of policing. People do not simply want criminals arrested; they also want daily problems solved: excessive noise, rowdy youths, double-parked cars.

Just an hour ago, a constituent reported to me some problems occurring in Oldham road, Springhead, which is in my constituency. Although it is a good area, it seems to be afflicted temporarily with the problem of crowds of up to 60 rowdy and sometimes drunken youths gathering round local shops. Individually, they are probably not breaking the law; collectively, they are a real nuisance, causing problems for shopkeepers and residents. Simply put, good local policing will be needed to sort out the problem, and I am confident that our divisional commander will ensure that his bobbies soon put a stop to the hooligan behaviour.

It is because of the same desire to maintain confidence and to reduce the fear of crime that I am so concerned about last Thursday's announcement that a local police station—in Milnrow, in Rochdale borough—is to close for health and safety reasons. I make a personal plea to the police authorities in Greater Manchester to ensure that that building is either put back into use or that an alternative facility is provided at the earliest opportunity.

Far from being separate from intelligence-led policing, police patrolling is crucial to it. As one sergeant recently said to me:

> "It's not the police who solve crimes, it's the public. They provide the information. We just fit the pieces of the jigsaw together."

Bobbies on the beat may not see the crimes taking place before their own eyes, but they talk to people on the streets, gather information and sense the atmosphere.

It is therefore disturbing to read the Audit Commission's finding that only 5 per cent. of police officers are debriefed properly at the end of a shift. If there is inadequate debriefing, the patrol officer is not being used properly, and, therefore, crime desks will not be provided with the intelligence necessary to ensure that criminals and crimes are targeted. I do not regard foot patrols as a panacea, but specialisms and targeting of particular criminals and particular crimes can and should be built around patrol work, rather than regarded as more important than it.

Some of the basics of good policing were perhaps forgotten in the 1960s, when the mobility provided by cars and the communication values of radios were placed over the value of the officer working a beat. Policing became more reactive, and officers less approachable. I am glad to observe recent efforts to re-establish some of those lost links.

In his most recent report, David Wilmot, the chief constable of Greater Manchester, stated:

> "Patrolling is an important function, not least because of the reassurance and perception of safety it conveys to the public. People want to see police officers on the streets."

That is absolutely right. It is via patrols that the police deliver a service to the public, but I wonder whether the good intentions outlined in such reports are being put into practice across the country.

I know from talking to the divisional commanders in Oldham and Rochdale that they want more officers put on the beat, and they are making sure that it happens. However, the Audit Commission revealed that only 5 per cent. of officers are on patrol across the country at any one time—one police officer for every 8,000 people. I have been trying to find out how many of those patrol officers are on foot.

The chief constable wrote to tell me in October:

> "Across the Force area 4,013 officers are assigned to general police duties. The number on foot patrol duties vary from day to day at the discretion of the local Commanders. This allows for a highly flexible and unified response".

However, it also means that we do not get to know how many patrol officers are on foot, and that patrols can quietly be used as a reservoir of manpower whenever something else turns up.

The Audit Commission also revealed that the proportion of constables whose main duty was foot patrol varied from 23 per cent. in some forces to a staggeringly low 1 per cent. in others. It seems that we are never going to meet the public's demand for more bobbies on the beat unless we establish a baseline for the number of officers allocated to the task of patrol work, and, in particular, patrol work on foot.

Chief constables are required annually to produce a local policing plan. I believe that it should contain a patrolling plan which sets out clear objectives for patrol work as well as the minimum target for the number of officers who should be on mobile or foot patrol at any one time in particular areas.

Some police officers say that to produce such figures would reveal just how few police officers are on patrol at any one time. The Audit Commission notes that the police are always reluctant to admit how thinly the blue line is stretched, because it undermines one of the very things that the police want to do, which is to give the public reassurance. However, I believe that the public should be

made aware just how few police officers are available in the community. How else, for example, will they be encouraged to press for best practice or to pay for more officers? I am seeking a statement of minimum targets, not actual practice, so that, for the criminal, uncertainty will remain.

I realise, of course, that for divisional commanders the task of allocating manpower is a thankless one. To meet competing demands, it will often be a matter of robbing Peter to pay Paul, but unless targets are set publicly, the job of patrolling will always risk coming bottom of the list of police priorities.

The policing plan drawn up by the chief constable should also clearly explain the force's approach to geographical policing and how it will allocate more officers to that work. The Audit Commission places great emphasis on the importance of that approach as a means of making policing and patrolling more proactive, problem solving, effective and satisfying for the officers involved.

I am convinced that having officers take responsibility for the "ownership" of an area is vital. I am sure that the people I represent want to know that there are not just a couple of area constables working in the community but a much larger group of patrol officers who regard towns like Shaw, Milnrow or Lees in my community as their patch.

My impression is that there has been some resistance to geographical policing in Greater Manchester because of fear that the command structure may be weakened if an inspector is too committed to just one part of a division. The answer is that implementation of geographical policing should be left in the hands of sergeants and experienced constables, rather than to the daily supervision of inspectors.

I pay credit to the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, who, in his recent report, entitled "The London Beat", took up all the points made by the Audit Commission and pledged to take most of the steps recommended in it. I shall watch with interest how his positive statements are put into practice.

Last year, the Police Federation reported that almost half the patrol officers wanted to transfer to a specialist unit. Why does the bobby on the beat want to get off the beat? It stems from the frustration of officers who are spending their time doing work that either seems to them to serve no purpose or which gives them no opportunity to get to grips with solving local problems. Too often, patrol officers say that they are treated like the lowest form of police life. It is important for the public to recognise those officers' responsibilities.

Decisions on the street are made not by officers, but by constables with minimum supervision. They decide whether to make an arrest and whether to use force. They are the physical demonstration of lawful authority in our land, and their work can be demanding and dangerous, but, as the Audit Commission revealed, in some cases, foot patrol is carried out exclusively by probationers. The report referred to "deeply ingrained attitudes" that undervalue patrol work, and said that any move to a specialist post was viewed as an upward step. Plain-clothes officers are threatened with being "sent back to the beat" if they do not perform.

One constable told me recently, referring to his superiors, "When we're in plain clothes, we get treated like adults. When we're in uniform, we get treated like children." It is sad that only 5 per cent. of officers are consulted about the annual policing plans drawn up by the chief constable. Only one third of constables are consulted even about local priorities for patrol work, or feel that patrol work is valued by senior officers.

That is the national picture. I should like to make it clear that I have the highest respect for, and a great deal of trust in, my local divisional commanders, and I know that they go out of their way to find ways of rewarding officers who prove themselves good bobbies, doing a good policing job. Personal recognition by the boss is a great morale booster.

However, formal steps should be considered by all forces to raise the status of patrol officers. Increased training is one such step, together with the chance to undertake a wider and more satisfying range of police work, such as including experience of taking fingerprints.

The need for new designations of police officer is perhaps more important. We need a rank between constable and sergeant. The Audit Commission suggests a rank of beat manager for an officer who is encouraged to develop skills, experience and contacts that can be applied to one community. Such officers would not only tutor probationers, as many experienced officers already do, but assist the sergeant in briefing and debriefing and assign voluntary or part-time officers to roles in the area, helping to put geographical policing into practice.

Given the public demand for visible policing and the effectiveness of patrolling when done with clear objectives, we should consider how to supplement the number of full-time officers available beyond those who can be released by the civilianisation programme or by current plans for additional funding for the police.

I shall not bandy words with the Minister about how many extra police officers are being allocated or have been allocated in the past. I am pleased that the Government are committed to increasing the number of police officers. I hope that the Minister will note that my party is, too. I note that the Labour party, not surprisingly, has once again refused to make any such commitment to expenditure.

I pay tribute to the voluntary work undertaken by the 20,000 specials across the country, but the hours that they can be expected to contribute and the high drop-out rate in urban areas such as Greater Manchester make it difficult to justify heavy investment in their training and development, or in building a visible policing strategy that relies on them.

I put it to the Minister that it is time to introduce a new category of retained police officer, similar to the retained firefighters who do a splendid job in many parts of the country, including Littleborough in my constituency. Officers in that category would be upgraded, better trained and paid specials, who could be rostered for an agreed and contracted number of hours each week, supplementing full-time officers in a wider variety of ways.

I refer finally to communications between the police and the public. Greater Manchester police has recently embarked on the closure of its divisional control rooms and the setting up of four area operations rooms. I am told that teething problems continue some months after the launch of the project.

Police officers keep telephoning me from across the country with one story after another, pleading with me not to reveal their names or the source, for fear of disciplinary

[Mr. Chris Davies]

action. They tell me that unlimited overtime is being paid to plug some of the holes and deal with the problems. They tell me that breakdowns in the computer equipment break links with the police national computer, and that poor radio reception means that officers simply cannot understand one another, and have no confidence that their messages are being received.

I do not know whether those allegations are true. Officers on the ground clearly believe that they are, but assistant chief constables denounce me as profoundly mistaken. As £11 million hase been invested in the project, perhaps they found it embarrassing to admit that problems are continuing. However, if they are, and that is being denied to ordinary officers who are experiencing them on a daily basis, the top brass are giving ordinary constables the impression that they are not listening to their concerns.

The Audit Commission attributes the problem to civilian staff working in control rooms across the country without understanding the day-to-day realities of police work. I have certainly encountered that problem in Greater Manchester. That leads to a breakdown in communications. Those staff should spend time accompanying police officers on the beat, so that they understand the terminology and the way in which the police react in a variety of circumstances.

Finally, I draw the Minister's attention to the fact that the 999 system is overburdened. It is being used more than ever before, but not exclusively for emergency calls. The operator has to determine which are emergency calls and which are not. The sheer number of 999 calls now being made means that patrol officers are firefighting rather than solving problems.

We need a 333 national line for non-emergency calls and crime-stopping information. The introduction of such a line will make people stop and think. If they have a serious concern to discuss with a police officer, but one that can wait 24 hours, for example, they should call 333. However, if it is really an emergency that requires a police officer immediately, they should call 999. I hope that the Minister will take that point on board. It was recommended by the Audit Commission, and it is his chance of fame today to announce that the Government will take positive and practical action in that respect.

Chief constables should set clear objectives for patrol officers, to raise the status of their work and put more officers into visible and effective geographical policing. The Home Office should publish guidelines to the effect that annual policing plans should make progress towards those ends, and I look forward to a positive response from the Minister.

9.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Davies) on obtaining tonight's Adjournment debate. The debate comes a little earlier than we expected, but it deals with an important subject and he has raised some significant issues.

The Government take the subject seriously. We fully recognise the value of patrol in delivering an effective police service and the need to keep under constant review how such important work can be made even more effective.

Indeed, the Government have an unparalleled record in supporting the police service in all aspects of its work. It ensures that the service is provided with sufficient financial resources. However, when it comes to the use of those resources, policing is fundamentally a local service and must be responsive to local needs.

Local conditions and patterns of crime vary from area to area. It is, therefore, for police authorities and chief constables to determine the issues to be given priority in their local policing plans. I shall deal specifically with the issues which the hon. Member has raised, but first I should like to say a few words reminding the House of the resources that the Government have provided for the police service.

I said that the Government's record is unparalleled, and so it is. Since we came to power total spending on the police has more than doubled in real terms. Total police service expenditure will have increased from just over £1 billion in 1978-79 to around £7 billion in 1997-98. The number of officers has increased by around 16,000. Civilian support staff numbers have risen by over 18,000. Constable strength is just under 98,000—an all-time record.

Funding this financial year is nearly 4 per cent. higher or £247 million more than it was in 1995-96. In 1997-98 there will be enough provision for chief constables to recruit 2,000 additional police officers. Funding for the current year and the next two financial years will enable an additional 5,000 police officers to be recruited nationally. The hon. Gentleman may be especially interested to know that, as part of that additional funding, Greater Manchester will receive £1.9 million in 1997-98, which is sufficient to recruit 100 more officers. It is estimated that its force strength will increase this year by 105. It has also instituted an ambitious civilianisation programme, which is expected to result in the release of 300 officers for operational duties.

I am delighted to say that in Greater Manchester there has already been a significant increase in patrol officers. In March 1981, there were 350 sergeants and 2,355 constables. In September 1996, the figures had risen to 395 sergeants and 2,815 constables. The chief constable is to be congratulated on that achievement.

The Government provide the strategic framework for the police service in England and Wales. Under the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994, now consolidated in the 1996 Police Act, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has the power to set key national objectives for the police service. Those are determined in consultation with chief officers and police authorities. They reflect the major policing concerns of the public and give the police service a clear steer on national priorities.

The key national objectives for 1997-98 are: to maintain and if possible increase the number of detections for violent crimes; to increase the number of detections for burglaries of people's homes; to target and prevent crimes that are a particular local problem, including drug-related criminality, in partnership with the public and local agencies; and to provide high-visibility policing so as to reassure the public. I assure the hon. Gentleman that chief officers are required by the Local Government Act 1992 to publish the percentage of uniformed operational constables' working time spent outside the station and in public. The final key national objective is

to respond promptly to emergency calls from the public. I shall come later to the hon. Gentleman's suggestions for changes in that respect.

The objective on high visibility policing clearly reflects the importance that the Government attach to patrol work. Police authorities are required to have regard to those objectives when drawing up their annual policing plans, but all day-to-day operational matters are for chief constables to decide. How many officers are assigned to foot patrol is one such question and it would not be right to introduce a central requirement for patrolling plans to be produced.

In addition to the key objectives, local priorities can be reflected in specific local objectives for each police force area. Those are set by police authorities in consultation with chief officers, not by chief officers alone, as the hon. Gentleman said. The Police Act 1996 also requires that police authorities consult their local communities on local objectives. In that way, local people can give their views on what goes into the annual policing plans. A two-way dialogue with the local community is crucial in enabling the police service to be responsive to local needs.

Annual policing plans are published by police authorities. Assessments of how far the plans have been achieved are included in the authorities' annual report. There is therefore considerable scope for public involvement in the determination of policing priorities. Through putting plans in the public domain local people can then see what the force is doing and through the annual reports they can see how well it is doing it. I am satisfied that those arrangements are what is needed for assessing police performance.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Audit Commission's "Streetwise" report, which was published in February this year. That report contained a number of recommendations aimed at helping the police to target their resources more effectively and we welcomed the report. The complex nature of the recommendations means that they might take time to implement and the report recognises that. It is also essential that any changes lead to tangible benefits in the longer term. Already a management handbook, entitled "Tackling Patrol Effectively", has been produced by the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Audit Commission, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, and the Home Office and it was issued to forces during the autumn. The handbook contains examples of good practice drawn from forces across England and Wales and I am sure forces will find these valuable.

The handbook provides good practice advice on many of the issues the hon. Member has raised, such as measures for patrol work; geographical policing; problem-orientated policing; enhancing the status of patrol officers; and beat managers. The hon. Member also mentioned measures aimed at enhancing the status of patrol officers through the introduction of beat managers. As I mentioned, advice on and examples of those issues are covered in the handbook and West Mercia introduced beat managers in April 1995. Dyfed Powys has established them throughout its area. Through the handbook, other forces can learn from their experience and consider the adoption of similar schemes. Other forces have found other ways to enhance the role of patrol officers by specifying the skills and aptitudes that a good patrol officer needs. Officers can then be accredited in those competencies. Such schemes are running in Kent and Merseyside. Again, forces will be able to refer to the handbook and cherry-pick those that they feel would work in their area.

The hon. Member also raised the issue of whether a 333 line should be introduced. The Association of Chief Police Officers has asked the Police Foundation to undertake some research on non-emergency communications between the police and the public and that may shed some light on whether such a service would be beneficial. I have taken careful note of the hon. Gentleman's comments and his support for such a scheme. On present knowledge, however, it is not certain that such a service would have the effect that the Audit Commission or the hon. Gentleman anticipate.

Emergency calls are just one of the many and various demands placed on our police service. A constant challenge for it is how to respond to those demands as efficiently and effectively as possible. Resources will always be finite and so it would be unrealistic to expect chief officers to increase activity on all fronts at once. Clearly a balance needs to be struck between putting officers on patrol and targeting resources at prolific offenders. Experience has shown that the targeting approach can be very effective in tackling crime.

Forces have gained good results by the improved use of information and intelligence, by using targeted data against prolific offenders and by assigning responsibility for investigation to local units. In some areas where the police have adopted those approaches they have more than doubled their clear-up rates. That has all contributed to the reduction in crime that has been achieved in the past three years. In the 12 months to June 1996, 5.1 million offences were recorded in England and Wales—a drop of 10 per cent. since June 1993. In Greater Manchester, a 14 per cent. reduction was achieved. That overall improvement is not consistently reflected across all types of crime, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, but it is extremely encouraging. The police service should be congratulated on its efforts to reduce crime.

The hon. Gentleman referred to various policing models used in the fight against crime. It is for individual chief constables to decide whether those models are appropriate for their areas. A number of forces have introduced such models and found them to work effectively, but that will not necessarily be the case everywhere.

Of course, the police, however effective, cannot do it all and the route to safer communities involves other agencies, the community at large, and other developments such as closed circuit television. CCTV does not replace officers, as some have said, but helps them do their job even better. It helps them detect and reduce crimes and convict criminals. It has been welcomed by the service and the Government fully support the introduction of new technology to fight crime. We are making £45 million available for CCTV through our challenge competitions. Our target is to have 10,000 new cameras in place over the next three years.

My ministerial colleagues and I have already had the pleasure of launching dozens of CCTV schemes that have received funds from our very successful competitions. I am privileged to have been asked to launch one such scheme in High Wycombe tomorrow. High Wycombe has benefited from the award of a £50,000 grant in our first

[Mr. Timothy Kirkhope]

competition. I am looking forward to seeing that system join the long list of those that are helping to fight crime and make our streets safer.

The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth also mentioned special constables, an area of particular interest to me personally. People who give up their spare time to become volunteer police officers are fulfilling a vital role, working with the police at the heart of the community to beat the criminals. I was pleased to attend recently the launch of a scheme to boost recruitment of special constables in Northumbria. This campaign, which is part funded by the Government's specials challenge fund, is aimed at promoting the special constabulary to potential recruits. As I said on that occasion,

"Specials are a shining example of partnership."

Work has started on the findings of the special constabulary working group, whose report was published in August this year. The Audit Commission's recommendation that special constables who perform a stipulated number of hours a week should be paid a bounty will be considered in the light of the working group's recommendation that a bounty should not be paid to specials. Whether or not a bounty is paid, special constables should not be asked to perform duties for which they have not been trained and properly equipped. Some £10 million of Government funding provided for the special constabulary over the last two years will help police forces to attain a common standard of equipment and training for their specials.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that we have a police service—from bobbies on the beat to the latest in technological innovations—that is second to none. The service is constantly facing new challenges and has an excellent record in responding to these. As the hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth is aware, Greater Manchester is one of several forces to have won the charter mark this year. That reflects just how well it is are responding, and the high-quality service it provides to the public. The Government remain committed to ensuring that the service as a whole has the resources it needs so it can continue to deliver those high standards, of which we in this country are justly proud.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-five minutes to Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 10 December 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL [LORDS]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Promoters of the King's College London Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read) and shall be ordered to be read the third time;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during any previous Session.—[*The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Tuesday 17 December.

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Jobseeker's Allowance

1. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the introduction of the jobseeker's allowance. [6820]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): Jobseeker's allowance has now been in operation for two months. It is helping people back to work and securing better value for money for the taxpayer.

Mr. Mitchell: Is it correct that this vicious, half-baked and ill-conceived measure is now producing all kinds of problems behind the scenes? Benefit offices are overwhelmed with work, so cases are taking two to three times longer than they took under unemployment benefit. Is it also correct that share fishermen, with their share fisherman's stamp, are experiencing unique difficulties because of their inability to produce proof of earnings from their last trip?

Mr. Evans: The general thrust of that question is misguided. Of course there are difficulties with such a complicated scheme, which involves many officials, but broadly speaking it is working well. I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman makes that point about share fishermen. With jobseeker's allowance—as before with unemployment benefit—they enjoy a special protected status that is unique in the benefits system, which reflects the hazardous and arduous nature of their work. The rules regarding their earnings have not been made more difficult. Share fishermen have been exempted from the remunerative work rule, and the averaging rules for their earnings under JSA are favourable to them.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Does my hon. Friend agree that nothing serves the recipients of benefits worse than for us to regard our responsibilities as having ended once we have handed over the money to them? Is it not much better for financial help to go hand in hand with active encouragement to find work and to get back into the labour market, because unemployment is the greatest evil that stalks this land and is the root of poverty in Britain?

Mr. Evans: The thrust of my hon. Friend's argument is right. In connection with the jobseeker's package, we introduced the back-to-work bonus, the national insurance contributions holiday, the extended four-week payments of housing benefit and council tax benefit, earnings top-ups and child disregard. Those measures are part of the Government's general package to get people off benefit and into work.

Benefits Agency (Wales)

2. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received

concerning the proposals by the management of the Benefits Agency in Wales for the closure of processing units and public caller offices. [6845]

Mr. Roger Evans: A number.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Is he aware that, in the past 12 months, there were 16,000 personal calls to the Benefits Agency office in Holyhead, 5,000 claims for social fund payments and 3,500 payments over the counter? How can the Benefits Agency claim that it provides a better service to the people of Holyhead, Llangefni and other areas in Wales when it is withdrawing facilities and closing offices? Vulnerable people will be worse off if the plans are implemented. We are grateful to the Minister for the two-months extension of the consultation period. Will he go one step further and scrap the plans?

Mr. Evans: The proposals are subject to consultation. As the hon. Gentleman said, the period has been extended and has not yet expired. The hon. Gentleman draws attention to the use of Benefits Agency offices in Anglesey at the moment, but he should bear in mind the fact that powerful factors are changing, and will change, the way in which people use Benefits Agency offices. The jobseeker's allowance is a streamlined benefit that has covered all unemployed people since 7 October. Previously, 70 per cent. of the unemployed case load was on income support, and those people went to a Benefits Agency office. There are four jobcentres in Anglesey, all of which provide a service for JSA.

Mr. Rogers: Does the Minister accept that the proposals for south Wales are, at the very least, ill conceived and half baked, and that whoever drew them up had no concept of the geography of south Wales? In the Rhondda valleys, for example, people will have to travel many miles by means of very poor public transport, because many of them do not have any private transport. The idea that they can do their business by telephone is just as daft. Will the Minister issue telephones to them so that they can contact his Department?

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman's comments, and all other representations, will be taken into account before any decision is made. I must point out to him, however, that telephone calls to the Benefits Agency are increasing in number and that, in certain circumstances, they are a more popular way of doing business with it. Modern technology enables telephone inquiries to be moved from where they are received to anywhere where an official is immediately available to deal with them. All those are important factors, and they will be borne in mind before a decision is taken.

State Pension

3. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ask the Government Actuary to estimate the additional cost of paying a full basic pension from age 60 years. [6847]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): At the instigation of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), I have already asked the Government Actuary to estimate the additional cost of allowing people to draw the full basic pension from age 60. He calculates that the cost would build up to an extra £15 billion per year.

Mr. Amess: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, to avoid the £15 billion cost of setting the pension age at 60, the basic state pension would have to be cut by £20 a week in Basildon, Southend, and across the country? Will he confirm that cutting the basic state pension by £20 a week is now the policy of the Opposition?

Mr. Lilley: I can confirm all the points made by my hon. Friend. The hon. Member for Peckham wrote to me after I had pointed out that the cost of her policy would be £15 billion a year. She stated:

> "In government we will protect the public purse from any increase in expenditure . . . We will have to consider what level of basic state pension should be paid . . . We would seek the advice of the Government Actuary, but we anticipate . . . lower level of basic state pension."

I asked the Government Actuary by how much the basic pension would have to be cut to avoid that cost, and he confirmed that it would be £20 a week for the rest of people's lives.

Mr. O'Hara: Speaking of pensions, the Secretary of State has referred to changes in the rules governing war pensions as "simplification". Since when does "simplification" mean cuts in four separate allowances for war pensioners and a tightening of eligibility rules for others? In whose dictionary does "cuts" mean "simplification"? Is it not merely a Tory con trick?

Mr. Lilley: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is joining in on a scaremongering story, which has been discredited since the leader of his party started it the other day. He should now know that we sent a detailed explanation of the measures that we were proposing to every member of the Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions, including the Labour party representative, the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale). They have had a week, since the Budget, to consider the explanation. Last Thursday, they met in full session—although the hon. Member for Mansfield was not able to attend and did not feel that the measures were a threat to the people he and the other committee members represent—at the end of which they unanimously deplored the leaks and the story in *The Guardian*, and commended the manner in which my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State had handled the matter.

Subsequently, the Royal British Legion issued a statement which said:

> "The overall consensus was that there is nothing unduly confrontational in the paper to cause concern among the ex-service organisations".

The British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association wrote to *The Guardian* to condemn its story, upon which the Opposition continue to rely, as containing

> "a number of grave errors which can only cause distress to War Pensioners."

Why are the Opposition causing distress to war pensioners?

Mr. Booth: In addition to protecting the basic pension, have we not also protected basic savings, in contrast to the Labour party, which presided over a great destruction of savings between 1974 and 1979, as inflation ripped away?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right. The greatest threat to pensioners is inflation. We know that inflation is what happens under Labour Governments. In a single year, the last Labour Government wiped out one quarter of the value of the lifetime savings of pensioners. That is why we have had to introduce extra help for the elderly people who retired under Labour—to enable them to rebuild their savings under a good Conservative Government.

Ms Harman: As those in retirement who are entitled to extra help from the Department of Social Security are war pensioners, will the Secretary of State confirm that one option that was not put out for consultation, but was under consideration as recently as 14 November, was

"restricting in some way claims by those with psychiatric conditions"?

That is a quotation from a DSS document. The principle of paying compensation for psychiatric conditions has been recognised since our troops experienced shell shock during world war one and suffered in Japanese prisoner of war camps in world war two. Will the Secretary of State keep faith with that principle and withdraw the proposal? Will he tell the House that he rules out restrictions on claims for psychiatric conditions caused by active military service?

Mr. Lilley: I am astonished that the hon. Lady should make that statement when she knows, because I wrote to her earlier today, that it is false. Neither I nor any of my Ministers have considered any such proposal. The hon. Lady may have a bit of paper written by a junior official purporting to suggest that it has been considered, but it has never been submitted to Ministers, has never been considered by Ministers, is not approved by Ministers and is not part of the package put to war pensioners. It is shocking and discreditable that the hon. Lady is trying to cause distress to elderly people who rightly receive help because of the mental suffering caused by their treatment at the hands of the enemy.

Social Security Spending

4. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the percentage of gross national product represented by Government spending on social security in (a) 1995, (b) 1990, (c) 1985 and (d) 1980. [6848]

Mr. Lilley: The figures are 12.5 per cent., 10 per cent., 11.5 per cent. and 10 per cent. respectively. Social security spending is now projected to drop as a proportion of national income over the remaining years of this century.

Mr. Wilkinson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that detailed reply. As social security spending still accounts for a considerable proportion of gross national product, thereby preventing wealth from going into investment and the creation of wider prosperity and jobs, will he put in the Conservative manifesto imaginative, radical proposals such as a funded national state pension scheme, which, in the medium to longer term, would reduce the proportion to well below 10 per cent.?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right. Social security has been among the fastest growing areas of expenditure for the past 50 years, since the welfare state was established.

Mr. Tony Banks: That is a mark of failure.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman thinks that it has been a failure since Beveridge set it up. We have introduced reforms that will result in spending growing less rapidly than national income, to leave scope for reducing taxes and creating a more prosperous economy, getting people off work and enabling them to save and meet the costs of retirement, as my hon. Friend suggests.

Mr. Banks: You have been getting people off work for the past 17 years.

Mr. Frank Field: Will the Secretary of State tell the House the percentage increase in real terms in social security expenditure since 1979? When he meets the electorate, will he consider that record a matter for congratulation or for concern?

Mr. Lilley: I cannot give the figure offhand, but I think that it is about 4 per cent. a year. That is a matter both for congratulation and for concern. It is a matter for congratulation that we have met and safeguarded the needs of the unemployed, the sick, the disabled, the elderly and carers. However, it is a matter for concern because the bill has been outstripping the nation's ability to pay. My predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), introduced reforms in 1986, which I have continued. The beneficial effects of those reforms have begun to show. We are now almost alone in the western world in having got a grip on the problem, and we can look forward with confidence to the future.

Mr. David Shaw: Can my right hon. Friend explain the fact that, in 1980, just after the Government took office, social security expenditure represented quite a low proportion of gross domestic product? Was it because there were a number of social security cuts between 1974 and 1979? Is my right hon. Friend old enough in political terms to recall Labour cutting the pension in real terms in 1976? Is it not a tribute to the Government that, since 1979, we have always increased social security in relation to inflation?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I do recall the cuts in real terms to pensions and the fact that for two years in succession Labour broke its promise on the Christmas bonus for pensioners. I do not believe that pensioners can look forward with confidence to another Labour Government, and I trust that they will remember that next May.

Mr. Wicks: Given the spending total on social security, does the Secretary of State really expect war pensioners to contribute to social security cuts? Is he really planning to stop the four-yearly assessments that lead to increased entitlements for veterans? Given the great service of our

veterans, is that not a cut too far? Will the Secretary of State confirm that the war pensions memorandum was called "Sweeteners" and that he received a copy of it? Does he accept that people do not want sweeteners, but want justice for veterans?

Mr. Lilley: I had thought better of the hon. Gentleman than that he should join in such shameful scaremongering. He has got it wrong. The changes in long-term assessments to which he refers mean that pensioners can seek a review at any time they wish, but they will no longer receive a letter, which many pensioners and the pensioner lobbies found disturbing as it suggested that their pensions would no longer be paid. That will no longer happen. The change will not save significant money, but it is welcomed by the pensioner lobbies. It is particularly extraordinary that the Labour party should suggest that we pick and choose our medical advice on such matters. That is a frightening suggestion, as the only part of the benefit system that allows Government some discretion as to how much they give war pensioners is in local government matters, and all but two of the local authorities that do not give full help to war pensioners are Labour-controlled—*[Interruption.]* There are 18 of them. If anyone decides to pursue the scare, I shall list those 18 local authorities in the House.

Mr. Brazier: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, apart from invalidity benefit, nearly all benefit increases have been in means-tested benefits, not universal benefits? Does he agree that we have to consider the dynamic effects of changes to the benefits system on social structures, not merely their immediate short-term impact? Does he accept the support of many Conservative Members for the courageous changes that he has made to housing benefit and payments to single-parent families as, in the long run, they should benefit the social structure and not merely produce short-term savings?

Mr. Lilley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the points that he makes. The growth has been not just in means-tested benefits. Benefit spending on war pensioners, for example, will increase next year—just as it has this year—because, unlike the Labour party, we are determined to protect and help war pensioners. My hon. Friend is right about trying to avoid means testing: I deplore Labour's plans to extend means testing into child benefit for those staying on at school and to pension entitlements—a proposal that Lady Castle has rightly condemned as a major extension of means testing to all pensioners.

Incapacity Benefit

5. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the real-terms percentage change since 1979 in social security spending on incapacity benefit. [6849]

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Alistair Burt): Between 1978-79 and 1994-95, expenditure on invalidity benefit rose by 216 per cent. in real terms. As a result of the introduction of incapacity benefit in April 1995, we expect expenditure in the long term to be significantly reduced.

Mr. Bradley: Is it not clear that the introduction of incapacity benefit will reduce benefit for people in ill health regardless of their circumstances? In the past month, two constituents have told me that they have had heart attacks and are still under the care of the local hospital and their general practitioners, but have had their incapacity benefit taken off them. Following my intervention, those benefits have been restored. Surely such people should be treated as being in exceptional circumstances due to their severe medical condition and should not have their benefit taken away. If the Minister agrees, will he ensure that fresh instructions are given to the Benefits Agency medical service so that no people who have had heart attacks and are under the care of a local hospital or a GP suffer the distress of having their benefits taken off them?

Mr. Burt: I have looked at the two cases that the hon. Gentleman raises: the matter is not quite as simple as he suggests. The treatment of those who have had heart attacks varies, as do their chances of getting back to work, depending on their condition. In the cases to which he referred, the system worked because there was an opportunity to review them. Whether somebody is capable of going back to work must essentially be a medical decision.

The hon. Gentleman attended a presentation of the all work test when he was an Opposition Front Bencher, and he had an opportunity to talk to doctors. He will be aware that there is no instruction from the Government to make life more difficult for those who suffer heart attacks. My concern is to ensure that doctors have sufficient scope to allow them to make the right decision. There is plenty of opportunity in the test to make exceptional decisions where they believe that there is a substantial risk to health. I am obviously concerned about some of the cases that have arisen recently, and I have already had meetings with officials in the Department. The all work test is being monitored, and a publication about it will be available early in the new year. At the moment, I am satisfied that doctors have the proper scope that they need.

Mr. Churchill: By their nature, war disability pensioners are a declining band. Was it really necessary, therefore, for the Government to deprive them of that to which they would have been entitled this year and in the years ahead? Will my hon. Friend clarify exactly when the measures that were announced on 5 December will be implemented? I have already received a significant number of disturbing letters suggesting that, for deafness, the policy was implemented several months ago. Consequently, many hundreds—if not thousands—of people are being deprived of £40 a week that they would have stood to receive under the previous arrangements.

Mr. Burt: I am not altogether sure whether my hon. Friend heard the earlier replies given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. If he did not, I suggest that he reads them in tomorrow's *Hansard*. I can tell him that it has been the practice right the way through the system to accept the medical advice that has been given to the Government when dealing with such cases. Most often, medical advice may allow extra claims and extra opportunity. If my hon. Friend is siding with the Opposition in wanting to allow the Government to pick and choose what information is accepted, he must appreciate the great danger of that course. The medical

evidence on which the Government are relying has been placed in the Library. All that I can do is urge him not to believe everything that he might read in *The Guardian*—

Mr. Churchill: When is it being implemented?

Mr. Burt:—but to listen to colleagues and read debates that have already taken place with the groups with which the Government discuss the proper implementation date for such measures.

Ms Lynne: Does the Minister accept that a number of people are not now getting incapacity benefit because they are allowed only five working days to prepare their appeal? That is happening at the same time as the Government are cutting benefits to war pensioners who gave their health in the service of this country. Is it not about time that the Government stopped attacking disabled people?

Mr. Burt: Expenditure on the sick and disabled has risen by some 280 per cent. since the Government have been in office. That record is based on the strength of the economy and is one that the hon. Lady, had she been a member of the Lib-Lab pact, could never have afforded. The success rate for appeals on invalidity benefit is running at about 44 per cent., which is comparable with other social security appeals. There is no way that the Government are being mean towards disabled people. Indeed, we have produced a range of legislation that will improve the quality of life for disabled people for many years to come.

Computer Systems

6. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the millennium compliance of his Department's computer systems and those connected with them; and if he will make a statement. [6850]

Mr. Burt: We have set up a central project to assess and manage the effects of the year 2000 date change. Investigative work is well under way. A full analysis of the work necessary to achieve compliance and an estimate of costs are expected to be completed by the end of January 1997.

Mr. Atkinson: In view of the crucial importance of the efficient and uninterrupted provision of pensions and benefits, not least at the turn of the century, does my hon. Friend agree that it will not be enough to ensure that the computer systems for which his Department is responsible are millennium compliant? What is he doing to ensure that computer systems in the private sector to which his Department's systems are connected will be safe in time?

Mr. Burt: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's interest in this important topic. I can confirm that the Department is working with its external suppliers, as their compatibility is crucial. I am sure that he will be glad to know that all new contracts are year 2000 compliant, and that existing contracts are being reviewed—and renegotiated where necessary—to ensure full compliance.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: A Minister told us yesterday that the switch for the millennium would be an extremely expensive project. Can the Minister tell us whether his projections for costs, which clearly come before the final projections in January, are included in the Red Book for the coming year and up until 1999?

Mr. Burt: At the moment, it is not possible for our Department to estimate precisely what the costs will be. The programme is that the report I mentioned in my main answer will be ready for the departmental board by the end of January 1997. By the end of August 1997, the work that needs to be done on costings will be done, and we expect the project to be implemented in the Department and all our systems to be compatible by the end of August 1998. We have some 18 major systems and some 1,500 small and medium-size systems. At the moment, it simply is not possible to make an estimate with any degree of credibility or accuracy. The work is under way, and as soon as those costs are available they will be made available to the House.

Child Benefit

7. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the impact of child benefit for 16 to 18–year–olds on the number of children staying in full–time education. [6851]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Andrew Mitchell): The proportion of 16-year-olds staying on at school is up from 42 per cent. in 1979 to 71 per cent. in 1995; for 17-year-olds, it has more than doubled from 27 per cent. to around 60 per cent.; and for 18-year-olds, it has nearly trebled, from 15 per cent. to 40 per cent.

Child benefit is a substantial part of the available financial support—last year, £644 million was paid to more than a million families with young people aged 16 and over in full-time education. It has provided, and will continue to provide, reliable and regular financial support, contributing £560 a year to the family income—and more than £1,000 if there are two such children in the family.

Mr. Spring: Does my hon. Friend agree that, for many families, the sum of £560 makes the crucial difference between the education and non-education of their children? Can my hon. Friend confirm that that sum—£560 for parents with children at school over the age of 16—would be lost under proposals from the Labour party?

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend's analysis is absolutely right. Furthermore, Labour, having wrongly analysed the problem it sought to address, now compounds its error by proposing to take away more than £1,000 from parents with two teenagers. That is Labour's teenage tax and it is the equivalent of 5p on the income tax of such families.

Benefit Recipients (Newham)

8. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his current estimate of the number of persons receiving benefit in Newham. [6852]

Mr. Roger Evans: Some information on the numbers receiving individual benefits in Newham is available.

However, as people often receive more than one benefit, I cannot supply information on how many, in total, are receiving benefit.

Mr. Banks: That sounds a bit like a cop-out. We know that there are tens of thousands of such people. It would help if the Minister would register that fact, because it shows the extent of poverty in Newham.

Is the Minister aware that one of the worst problems arises from the habitual residence test—which exists not in law, but only in Benefits Agency guidance? The way in which the test impacts tends to vary between offices. For example, in Stratford, two thirds of people fail the test; in Plaistow, only 8 per cent. do so. When people fail, they lose all benefit, which means that social services must pick up an enormous burden. On appeal, large numbers of people succeed in overturning the original decision, but in the meantime they have to suffer. May we please have some proper statistics on the way in which the test impacts in Newham, and further monitoring of the different ways in which it is applied by benefit offices?

Mr. Evans: It is not a cop-out. I can supply the hon. Gentleman with the detailed figures, but I will not weary the House with them—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] If the House wishes to be wearied, I shall start reading. For the most recently available date, the figure for those on income support is 33,000; for unemployment benefit before 7 October, it is 16,000; for housing benefit, 41,000; and for council tax benefit, 35,000. For many of the other benefits, information is not broken down on a borough basis.

Newham's particular problems with deprivation are recognised by the Government in the generosity of the standard spending assessment under the local government settlement. The hon. Gentleman said that the habitual residence test was applied inconsistently between benefit offices. If he cares to write to me with specific case details, I shall happily investigate the matter.

Mr. John Marshall: My hon. Friend has told us how many people receive benefit in Newham. How many more people in Newham would receive benefit if we were to sign up to the minimum wage and the social chapter, thereby adopting the job-destroying policy of the Opposition?

Mr. Evans: An unknown number, but a great deal more.

Mr. Spearing: Is the Minister aware that an increasing number of people in Newham who previously received benefit because they were incapacitated are now, on a medical examination, found allegedly fit for work? Will he tell the House whether the recent changes in the rules were based on sound medical advice—and, if so, from whom—or whether there is some other motivation in the Government's mind?

Mr. Evans: The latest figures that I have show that 7,447 people in Newham receive incapacity benefit. My hon. Friend the Minister of State set out the position with the appeals process a moment ago.

On the all work test, the Government have always acted on expert medical advice.

State Pension

9. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received in respect of a review of the decision to raise pensions in line with prices rather than earnings. [6853]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald): We receive many representations on this point. The fact remains that the estimated net cost of increasing the basic pension from April 1997 by the higher of earnings or prices since 1980 would be £7.9 billion.

Mr. Greenway: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government's policy remains one of continuing to increase the retirement pension in line with inflation and targeting additional help on the elderly poor? Does he agree that, from the figure that he has mentioned, no Government could afford to restore the earnings link? Is it not sheer hypocrisy for the Opposition to criticise the removal of the earnings link without committing themselves to restoring it?

Mr. Heald: Despite the ending of the earnings link, the average net incomes of pensioners have risen by 51 per cent. since 1979. That is because we have maintained the value of the basic state pension, encouraged private provision and targeted help on those most in need.

What is the Opposition's advice? It is vague and subject to a review body. We have exchanged the dangerous old certainties of Labour for a new dangerous uncertainty. As Baroness Castle put it—well, it is meaningless, is it not?

Mr. Denham: Among the pensioners who have to supplement their basic state pensions are war pensioners. Will the Minister confirm that three of the administrative changes that are proposed—ending reminders, ending automatic uprating or review and requiring independent evidence—will mean that, over and above any administrative savings, 16,000 war pensioners, according to the Department's own civil servants, will lose out? Will the Minister confirm that 16,000 war pensioners will lose out as a result of those so-called administrative savings?

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave earlier—it made the position clear—and also to what BLESMA, the British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association, has said:

> "The Government proposals introduce a number of improvements which will benefit both War Pensioners and War Widows and materially assist the War Pensions Agency in dealing more expeditiously with claims and appeals."

That is what the people at the sharp end say. They do not go scaremongering, like the Opposition.

Mr. Stephen: Does my hon. Friend recall how easy it was for the Labour party to link pensions with rises in

average earnings? In those days, Labour's management of the national economy was so incompetent that prices were rising a good deal faster than average earnings.

Mr. Heald: As my hon. Friend says, the Labour party in government robbed pensioners. There was 15 per cent. inflation every year for people who had saved throughout their lives. That is why we now need to target extra help on those who are most in need—and we are doing that: an extra £1.2 billion has been provided every year since 1988.

Single Mothers

10. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the percentage of single mothers who are dependent on state benefits. [6854]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: In 1995, 65 per cent. of lone mothers were receiving income support and 17 per cent. family credit.

Mr. Williams: What help can the Minister announce for single parents who want to find work but cannot, because of the benefits trap, the lack of affordable child care and the lack of employment and training advice? Why do the Government continually use single parents as a scapegoat? Why do the Government not lend a hand to help them out of benefits dependency?

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman asks what help the Government can announce. Every week, the Government announce measures designed to help lone parents to return to work. In October, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the parent plus scheme, to be piloted over the next three years. That scheme will be the best of its type practised anywhere in the world.

Mr. Nicholls: Is not the real benefits trap in circumstances of this kind the fact that, if a woman had three illegitimate children, she would receive far more benefit than the possible earnings of any probable husband? Instead of reinforcing family life, the benefits system now positively undervalues it by making it clear that the family must view the state as the father of first rather than last resort.

Mr. Mitchell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Not a month goes by without an improvement in the performance of the Child Support Agency in getting maintenance through, principally to mothers. My hon. Friend is right in other respects as well. Through the into-work and in-work benefits, and through the after-school places endorsed by the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman), the Government have made a real difference in helping the 90 per cent. of lone parents who want to work to achieve their aim.

Benefit Applicants (Transport)

11. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he proposes to reduce the transport difficulties faced by benefit applicants in scattered rural communities. [6855]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Benefits Agency provides a full range of services from its extensive local office network, by post, by telephone and, for those who need it, by home visits.

Mr. Tyler: Will the Minister pay particular attention to the problem of those in rural areas who are trying to obtain the jobseeker's allowance? In such areas, insistence on attendance at a jobcentre often means a journey of many hours in the more scattered rural areas. Even if public transport is available, the cost may be £4 or £5 a time, taking a major proportion of the allowance that those people may receive. When will the Government stop discriminating against rural areas?

Mr. Evans: It is quite the reverse. Until the introduction of jobseeker's allowance, 70 per cent. of the unemployed were on income support and were dealt with by Benefits Agency offices. The Employment Service's jobcentre network is more widespread; there are five jobcentres in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, and the jobseeker's allowance is administered through them.

Mr. Garnier: Is the answer to reduce not the transport difficulties but the number of unemployed in rural areas, and are we not doing precisely that, by reducing rates and improving the economy so that more people can get back to work in both urban and rural areas?

Mr. Evans: My hon. and learned Friend is right on all points.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Minister agree that all recipients of benefit should get equal value from that benefit? Despite the help given by managers and staff in Department of Social Security offices in alleviating poor transport to offices for claimants, will he consider providing travel warrants for those who have to attend?

Mr. Evans: The position is that, if people are required to attend a Benefits Agency office for a specific interview, in Great Britain, the costs are met less 80p. The fortnightly signing on at an Employment Service jobcentre is not covered, but the service pays the full cost of transport if a special interview is required.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 December. [6874]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Kirkwood: In spite of commendable resolution at the weekend, is it not clear to everyone that attempting to

run a minority Government, with a party in open revolt, makes it impossible to secure a deal that is in the long-term interests of the United Kingdom, at Amsterdam, Dublin or anywhere else? If, as the Prime Minister suggested on Sunday, he is motivated by the national interest, will he operate on that basis and call for an early Dissolution of Parliament, so that we can have an early general election?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will be unsurprised to hear that I will pick the election date in my own time and not at his behest.

On the discussions in Europe, I set out the Government's position with great clarity. There are a number of extremely difficult questions to face in the intergovernmental conference over the next few months; on some issues, we have allies in Europe and, on others, we do not, but in each instance we have set out our position and we propose to stick with it.

Mr. Alison: Is my right hon. Friend aware of how greatly the public at large, especially parents, will welcome the Government's decision to press the broadcasting authorities to curb television violence? Does he agree that, if there is even slight evidence that increased screen violence is linked, via imitation or disinhibition, to increased crime, the benefit of the doubt must be given to the potential victims of such crime and no reasonable remedies must be discounted?

The Prime Minister: I believe that my right hon. Friend has spoken for parents throughout the country. There is a difficult balance to keep in ensuring that we have free and open media and that they maintain the standards that are appropriate for society generally and for children. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage has today agreed a plan of action with the chairmen of the BBC, the Independent Television Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Council, and we look forward to its being carried out.

Mr. Blair: Does the Prime Minister agree with Sir Leon Brittan, who said this morning that Conservative party divisions were weakening Britain's negotiating position in Europe?

The Prime Minister: There are two things that really damage the national interest in negotiating in Europe. The right hon. Gentleman is perfectly right to say that, when the House of Commons is not united on any issue, that weakens any Government's position in international negotiations. That is certainly true; but what also undermines our national interest and our negotiating position in Europe is the fact that many of the socialist Governments in Europe expect, were there to be a Labour Government, a very easy ride and a distinct change of policy. They believe that a Labour Government would make changes and surrender positions to which this Government have held—positions which, if surrendered, would be damaging to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Blair: May I suggest to the Prime Minister that, after his interview on Sunday, much of which I would agree with, there is less clear water between him, his deputy, one half of the Cabinet and the Opposition than between him and most of his Back Benchers? If he is not prepared to agree with Sir Leon Brittan, does he stand by his own comments at the weekend that the Conservative divisions were "self-evidently" damaging to Britain's interests?

The Prime Minister: I made that perfectly clear at the weekend. The right hon. Gentleman knows that. I have also made it clear that the Government have set out a position that we believe to be in the national interest. The national interest is going to come before the party interest. There is no doubt about that, and I made that absolutely clear again. I repeat to the right hon. Gentleman that what also damages the national interest is the belief among our partners in Europe that many of the positions that we hold would be surrendered by an alternative Government.

Mr. Blair: I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister has admitted that these Conservative divisions damage the country's interest. *[Interruption.]* "It is obvious," shouts a voice from the Back Benches. It is obvious, except to the Conservative party. Is the Prime Minister aware that Lord Blake has said in the past few hours that he has never seen the Conservative party in such disarray in 14 general elections? Is he aware that, this lunchtime, the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) referred to the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) as "politically insane"? Some might say that he is a good judge of such matters. If all that is the case, does not the Prime Minister agree with the vast majority of people who say that, if the Conservatives cannot be trusted to run themselves, why should they be trusted to run this country?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman knows full well that he has precisely the same divisions on his own Back Benches. I look at the hon. Members for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and I ask whether they share the same position on European matters as the right hon. Gentleman. But I shall tell him about unity: we are united in our opposition to a centralist, federalist Europe as much as Labour is united in favour of a federal Europe. We are standing up for Britain's interests in Europe; the Labour party is determined to stand up for Brussels' interests in Britain.

Mr. Nigel Evans: My right hon. Friend knows, because he has visited it, that Ribble valley is a beautiful part of the United Kingdom that attracts many thousands of tourists every year. Many hundreds of jobs are involved in the tourism industry there; many of them are in small businesses, such as bed and breakfast, small restaurants and cafeterias. What does he believe would be the impact of the introduction of a minimum wage and the social chapter and of caving in to every rule and regulation from Brussels on small businesses in Ribble valley?

The Prime Minister: There is no doubt about the impact. Small businesses would suffer greatly were those policies to be imposed on them. Not only would existing small businesses suffer greatly but jobs would be lost. Not only would present jobs be lost but the future

construction of small businesses would be inhibited and future jobs that would otherwise be created would not be created.

Q2. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 December. [6875]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Denham: Will the Prime Minister confirm that the changes taking place in the administration of war pensions include the end to automatic reviews of entitlement, an end to reminders to submit claim forms and a requirement to provide independent evidence before a review can take place? Most important, will he confirm that civil servants estimate that, over and above any administrative savings, 16,000 war pensioners will lose out as a result of those changes?

The Prime Minister: Last week, the Leader of the Opposition made a number of charges about war pensions which he now knows to be incorrect. He may not have known it last week when he said it in the House, but he now knows that it was incorrect and I hope that he will correct it. A few hours ago, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman) made charges about war pensions, which she now knows were incorrect. She was told, in the past half-hour in the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, that they were incorrect. The fact is that some of the changes made last week extend benefits rather than reduce them. Some claimants will get more. No claimants will lose.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) will know of the letters written by the British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association and the Royal British Legion which made it clear that the publicity last week and the activities of the Labour party totally misrepresented the Government's policy and what the Government had done on the issue. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not in the same business.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Will the Prime Minister confirm full and continuing support for grammar schools, which provide unique opportunities for children from low-income homes to achieve educational excellence? Will he resist in all ways something that is worrying us in Southend, where a quarter of all our children attend such grammar schools—abolition of selection tests, which would be a recipe for the destruction of these excellent schools?

The Prime Minister: I can confirm that. As my hon. Friend will know, there are proposals before the House to allow a limited amount of selection in schools of all sorts in the state sector. What we seek to do in the education sector is provide a degree of diversity that matches the diversity of the children. A single, regimented, rigid system does not enable the diversity of education that our children need to have provided. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment is presenting a Bill to the House that will extend diversity and prevent the problem set out by my hon. Friend.

Q3. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 December. [6876]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Jones: Surely the Prime Minister must now accept that the civil war in his party makes it impossible for his Government to have any clear authority in negotiations in Dublin or anywhere else. Would he take seriously any other European Government who were in the same shambles as his own? The last time this happened, the Prime Minister resigned as party leader. Now that it has happened again, will he, in the interest of the country, resign as Prime Minister and call a general election?

The Prime Minister: The simple answer is no.

As for divisions, if the hon. Lady is so concerned about them, perhaps she might have a word with the 50 or so of her colleagues who have made it perfectly clear that they are wholly opposed to a single currency. On one day, we have 50 of them saying that they are opposed to a single currency and others, led by the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), writing to *The Independent* saying that they are in favour of it. The hon. Lady had better realise that the splits in the Opposition are seismic.

Mrs. Gorman: Has my right hon. Friend had time to read the MORI poll published in *The Sun* newspaper yesterday, which was, in part, conducted in my constituency and which showed that 68 per cent. of respondents felt that they did not wish to be in a single currency and wished to keep the pound; and that almost 50 per cent. said that they would rather not be in the European Union at all? Is he aware of other polls that reflect similar sentiments? Does he not think that the honest way to clear the air would be to have a referendum and ask the people of Britain which way they would like our country to go in future?

The Prime Minister: We made it clear last April that, if the Government decided that we would enter into a single currency, there would be a referendum on the specific question whether we should go into a single currency. That has been settled policy since last April and I hope that my hon. Friend will support that policy.

What we need in this country is a rational debate on the issue of Europe, so that—not only on the issue of a single currency, but on all the other important issues that lie ahead of us in the intergovernmental conference—people have a reasoned debate and are then able to make reasoned judgments on the basis of facts, and not scares.

Gulf War Illness

3.30 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): With your permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on Gulf war illness.

As the House will remember with great pride, six years ago some 50.000 British troops deployed to the Gulf as part of the allied coalition to liberate Kuwait. The prime concern and duty of the Government and the chiefs of staff—now as then—was the safety and welfare of our service personnel; and the commanders on the ground took every possible step to minimise the risk faced by our troops. The House will recall that British troops were facing an aggressor who had formidably well-equipped armed forces, and whom we correctly assessed as possessing and being capable of using weapons of mass destruction.

The Gulf campaign was, by any standards, a brilliant feat of arms. The number of British service men killed or wounded in action was, mercifully, much smaller than had at one stage been feared. Illness amongst our troops in the desert was much lower than that experienced during earlier conflicts—a reflection of the steps taken to maintain very high standards in the face of unfamiliar, difficult and sometimes unhealthy conditions.

Since the conflict, a small number of those who served have become ill. Some of those are ill with clearly recognisable symptoms, for which they are receiving appropriate treatment; others are suffering from sickness which medical science has so far found it difficult readily to explain. There have been suggestions that some of those unwell are afflicted by a specific syndrome caused by service in the Gulf.

I want to make it plain yet again that, as much as we were anxious for the welfare of our troops during the conflict, so we remain no less concerned about the health of our Gulf veterans, both serving and retired.

In our search for answers, we have throughout been guided by the best medical and scientific advice available in the land. In 1993, we established a medical assessment programme to try to diagnose the reasons why some Gulf war veterans were ill. In order to establish the professional independence and integrity of this work, the methodology of the programme was audited, at my request, by the Royal College of Physicians, and was endorsed by that body in July 1995.

So far, some 921 veterans have been examined, and have been referred for appropriate further treatment where necessary. Although the results have not produced any evidence of a new pattern of illness, the Government retain an entirely open mind on whether there is generally more illness amongst our veterans than should be expected, and whether there are Gulf service-related factors at work which remain to be discovered. It is now clear that the medical assessment programme alone cannot answer those questions. On the advice, therefore, of the Royal College of Physicians, we have asked the Medical Research Council to establish a major, independent, peer-reviewed research programme.

The MRC has considered in great detail a large number of research proposals. It advises that the only scientifically sound way to proceed is by conducting epidemiological studies to address two specific questions: are British Gulf veterans suffering more ill health than they would have done had they not served in the Gulf, and if so, what is the nature and magnitude of the phenomenon; and are British veterans finding disproportionate difficulties in having children, or are their offspring suffering from an unusual number of birth defects, and if so, what is the nature and magnitude of the risk?

The MRC's recommendation is to proceed with two studies, which I am pleased to be able to announce today. They will be led by Professor Nicola Cherry at Manchester university and by Dr. Patricia Doyle of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. The costs, which will amount to about £1.3 million, will be met by the Ministry of Defence. I should like to express my thanks to Professor Alan McGregor of King's college medical school for his work as chairman of the Medical Research Council committee examining these matters.

The Medical Research Council advises us that, if the studies are to be rigorously and scientifically conducted, they will take about three years to complete. The Medical Research Council tells us that the research programme should find the answers we seek. The projects will be carefully co-ordinated with a major United States-funded epidemiological study, which is being conducted in parallel at King's college, London by Dr. Simon Wessely.

The Government have throughout worked very closely indeed with the US authorities on Gulf war-related health research. From the start, there has been the most extensive—indeed, almost daily—contact between the medical teams involved on both sides of the Atlantic. We are most truly grateful for that assistance.

I visited the United States recently to discuss those matters in detail. I want the House to know that we are as one with the Americans, and that they have agreed to allow us unfettered access to the results of the extensive research programme that they have in hand. I attach the greatest importance to that extremely valuable co-operation.

So as to consolidate those links further, I have appointed a British medical liaison officer to work in the United States Department of Defense research programme. A British officer already sits on the US research working group, affording us a valuable insight into its on-going work.

Meanwhile, at the request of the American authorities, the Medical Research Council has agreed to review the research that has been carried out in America. That will enable us to establish the relevance of any of their studies to the health of our veterans, and whether there are any obvious gaps.

The Government are also taking further steps to remind veterans of the existence of the medical assessment programme. At the same time, we are writing to all the general practitioners of all those who have been seen in the medical assessment programme so as to improve our knowledge of the medical progress of retired service men.

There has been much speculation that explanations for illness among Gulf veterans can be found in the various hazards that faced our troops during the campaign. The Government wish to be entirely open about what happened during the Gulf conflict, and I wish to emphasise that we have nothing to hide, and, indeed, absolutely no reason to do so.

In this connection, as I promised, I am now able to update the House on the use of pesticides in the protection of our forces during the campaign. Understandably, that issue has given rise to genuine concern in recent weeks.

The House will recall that I made it public on 4 October that there had been wider use of organophosphate chemicals in the Gulf than had previously been thought, or than we had previously been advised. I have already apologised to the House for that, and expressed my profound regret and anger that that ran counter to earlier information given in utmost good faith by Ministers in answer to parliamentary questions. I unreservedly do so again. I subsequently told the House that a comprehensive investigation had been commissioned to discover the facts, and I promised to report the outcome as soon as it was known.

My noble Friend the Lord Privy Seal told another place on 4 December that we expected the results before Christmas. I received the report of that investigation, which covers two separate areas, on 6 December.

On the first, which is what actually happened in the Gulf, the investigation team discovered that OP pesticides were indeed used by our troops in the Gulf to deal with the serious threat posed by fly-borne disease on a much wider scale than previously reported. Secondly, the investigation team discovered that, with the exception of the possible small-scale use of pesticides obtained incorrectly, there is no evidence that they were improperly used.

There is also the question of the dusting powder used to delouse Iraqi prisoners of war, where the inquiry has found that the number of Iraqi prisoners involved ran to hundreds rather than the 50 previously reported to the House. Again, I very much regret the fact that Ministers, and therefore the House, should have been inadvertently misinformed.

I am making arrangements for this section of the report to be published in full, and a copy is being placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

The House will understand that, given the extraordinary pressure of work generated by the vast and complex preparations for a sustained period of high-intensity conflict, and at a distance of six years, we simply cannot be sure of all the details. There may indeed be individual veterans who have further information to add to the story: if so, we would welcome it. We are as anxious as anyone to establish what happened. They should get in touch with me at the Ministry of Defence. I want the House to be wholly confident that we are absolutely determined to establish what happened.

The second part of the investigation deals with the question of how parliamentary questions were answered. The key findings are that the first parliamentary question in July 1994 was answered incorrectly because Ministers were given flawed advice arising from a failure within one area of the Department; and that the original flawed advice was repeatedly resubmitted in answer to further parliamentary questions.

On the question of how Ministers became aware of the mistake that had been made, detailed investigation has found that the possible local purchase of OP pesticides was mentioned in background material to a written parliamentary question answered in October 1995. In June 1996, officials on one occasion suggested possible difficulties over the standard briefing line on pesticide use. In July, a note included in briefing material mentioned OP pesticide purchase and use; but it was not until 25 September that Ministers were given clear, written advice on the wider use of pesticides during the Gulf war, and that previous answers needed to be corrected.

I must emphasise again that Ministers at no stage knowingly misled the House on this matter, nor would they ever have done so, and I again unreservedly apologise to the House that this should have come to pass.

The evident failures in providing proper and timely advice to Ministers are a matter of serious concern. It is essential that the reasons are examined in detail. Accordingly, a separate investigation, overseen by the permanent under-secretary, is being set in hand.

Because of its potential implications for individuals, arising from the possibility of disciplinary or administrative action affecting careers, it would be against natural justice to publish the detailed information gathered so far on these matters. I can, however, assure the House that the further investigation will be completed as soon as possible and the findings made available to the House at the first opportunity.This is a serious matter, and I felt it important to report the facts as soon as they became available.

I now turn to the issue of the vaccination programme against possible biological weapons attacks in the Gulf. There has been concern that those vaccinations might have contributed to some of the sickness reported, although there is at present no evidence to support that.

I am sure that the House will understand the need for the greatest care to be taken over the release of the details of our response to a biological or chemical weapons threat. That could clearly be of value to potential future aggressors.

However, following a detailed review, we now judge that, six years on and in the light of further developments since the Gulf conflict, knowledge of the steps that we took then is now less militarily sensitive. I can therefore today provide a full account of the vaccination programme that was carried out, and to this end I am placing a detailed memorandum today in the Library of the House of Commons.

The memorandum makes it clear that the MOD acted swiftly to offer the best protection available to our forces—on a voluntary basis—in the face of a clearly assessed potentially lethal threat—an assessment since wholly vindicated by the findings of the United Nations special commission. In the event, Saddam Hussein did not—thank God—use his biological weapons, but no responsible Government could have ignored the very real possibility that he might have done so, and accordingly appropriate precautions were taken.

Finally, my Department has been keeping a very careful watch on the many reported incidents of chemical and biological weapons use in the Gulf. We have so far traced around 100 such claims, all of which have proved unfounded. However, it does seem likely that some chemical weapons material may have been released, after hostilities ceased, by the destruction of the Iraqi ammunition dump at bunker 73 at Al-Khamisiyah. As the House has already been told, at the time there were no United Kingdom units in the footprint of potential danger since identified by the United States authorities.

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

I am today placing in the Library of the House a copy of a map showing the exact location of our units at the time the destruction took place.

In conclusion, the Government spared no effort to protect our troops in the Gulf war, and our immunisation and environmental health programmes were solely directed to that end. We have of course every sympathy for those veterans who are ill, and we retain an open mind about whether there is or is not a Gulf war syndrome. Whatever the case, we are determined to get to the bottom of it, as I hope very much that this statement has demonstrated.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I thank the Minister for coming to the House today to make this important, long and complicated statement, which represents a victory for those of us who have been campaigning for more openness and urgency in the Government's response to illnesses suffered by people who served in the Gulf war.

Does the Minister understand the frustration and the anger felt by Gulf war veterans and by hon. Members on Opposition Benches that the Government have taken more than three years to arrive at this point? The statement today reveals a shift in the Government's approach, but why, oh why, have they taken so long to reach this position? Why has it taken three years for the Government to admit its central line of defence:

"It is now clear that the medical assessment programme alone cannot answer these questions"?

That was clear to us more than three years ago. Why did the Government ignore the warnings about veterans' health for so long? Does the Minister realise that the Government's failure to act has caused three years of unnecessary suffering and concern among our veterans?

Why have the Government changed their mind about the other crucial question of conducting an epidemiological study of the problem, which I urged upon the Minister in the House more than three years ago? Does he recall writing to me about that subject in February 1995? He said:

"there were a number of reasons on both medical and statistical grounds, why such a study"—

an epidemiological study—

"was not appropriate".

Today he has finally accepted our argument that an epidemiological study is the way forward. What has changed his mind? If an epidemiological study was not appropriate in February 1995, why is it crucial now? I put it to the Minister that his statement today raises more questions than it answers.

The Secretary of State has spent much time trying to respond to questions about the organophosphates incident, but the questions remain. We understand that there will be two investigations, but I am concerned that neither will do anything to improve the health of those soldiers who may have been affected by organophosphates.

Will there be an inquiry into that aspect of the problem? Will that inquiry establish precisely why a post-operational Army report, dated March 1991, detailing inadequate protection for our troops from chemicals, was not acted upon? Why did it take four years for the Ministry of Defence to learn of that report?

How does that report square with the Minister's comment today that there is no evidence that organophosphates were used improperly? The 1991 report gives repeated examples of inadequate equipment, no equipment and no protection for the troops. Will the Minister also confirm that, last week in the other place, it was alleged that the medical records of more than 10,000 veterans have been wiped from the computer? Is that correct? The question was not answered when it was raised in the other place.

We are pleased that the Government appear to have moved some way forward today, but we are rather tired of finding that the fine words being used by the Minister—quite rightly praising the excellence of our troops—are not matched by actions.

I hope that the Minister's statement is a statement that the Government are taking the issue seriously, and that our veterans will have their true concerns addressed properly.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the measured tenor of his response. I do indeed understand the frustration of those who feel that they are ill as a result of their Gulf service. We would be delighted to be able to magic an answer tomorrow morning to set their minds at rest, but that is simply not possible. The United States has spent millions of pounds on research programmes already, and so far it has made little progress, which is why it is matching our epidemiological programme, with Dr. Wessely in London.

The hon. Gentleman asked me how it had taken so long to reach this position. Again, that is an entirely legitimate question. We have throughout always been guided by the proper and best medical advice available. The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), set up the medical assessment programme as soon as the first complaints about illness from the Gulf came through, in 1993. By the end of 1993, only three people had been through the medical assessment programme.

I referred that work to the Royal College of Physicians, in 1995, which, after reviewing it and endorsing it, suggested that I refer certain matters to the Medical Research Council, which I did in May of this year. In October, the MRC came forward with its proposals, and I am now in a position to announce the results today.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that we have never ignored any warnings about veterans' health. We are indeed wholly aware of the needs and requirements of some of those people who are clearly sick. Some of them, as the hon. Gentleman knows, have already received appropriate treatment for clearly defined illnesses, but there are others for whom we do not yet have an answer as to why they are ill. The study was not appropriate earlier because the numbers in the medical assessment programme were simply not big enough to provide a reference point. The hon. Gentleman mentioned February 1995, when he discussed the matter with me. By then, only 301 people had been through the medical assessment programme. Today, more than 900 have been through as a result of further urging and publicity.

On the question of organophosphates, those who gave any evidence of OP-type symptoms when being assessed at the medical assessment programme have indeed been

recalled and are being reassessed, and those whose treatment warrants it are being sent for further detailed neurological care and examination.

I know that the hon. Gentleman will read carefully the report of the organophosphate investigation team. He will read, in detail, about how OPs were used entirely properly, with the possibility of one small exception. I have every confidence that, given the circumstances, everything was done that could have been done to protect our troops.

I know nothing of the medical records of 10,000 personnel being wiped from a computer. Medical record keeping in the Gulf was not satisfactory. It was not good enough on behalf of our own troops. Nor was it good enough on behalf of the American troops. I asked the American Surgeon-General what he would do, most importantly, if America had to go to war again, and he said, "I would make absolutely sure that we had a far better system for keeping medical records." The same would apply to us.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): I commend my hon. Friend on his statement today. I thank him also for the recognition that he showed in his statement of the responsibility that I and my colleagues took to try to ensure that our troops who went to the Gulf were as well protected as they could be, including vaccination, from the fearsome weaponry that we knew that Saddam Hussein had, and which subsequent investigation by the United Nations commission revealed that he did indeed have.

There is no question but that we had to face quite unprecedented problems in trying to protect the health of our troops in the unexpected and suddenly occurring event that was the Gulf war. Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government's actions throughout the difficult period of trying to assess the unexpected problems that have occurred since the end of the Gulf war have been guided at all times by the best medical advice? The reality is that the medical assessment programme has proved not to be the conclusive answer that many had hoped it would be.

I commend the Minister for his courage in coming forward and recognising the need for a change of approach, and for his determination to fulfil his final pledge—on which he carries the whole House with him—that we owe a duty of care to all our service men, ex-service men and veterans, not just at the time of conflict and when they are needed in times of war, but after the war is completed if they need our help and attention.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I warmly endorse and applaud the bold and entirely necessary decisions that he and the chiefs had to take at that time to ensure that, in unfamiliar territory, a long way away and against the potential of the most grotesque weapons that exist, our troops were as well protected as they possibly could be against horrific potential hazards. I am grateful to him for his recognition that we have at all times been guided by the best possible medical advice. Indeed, it would be ridiculous for Ministers to do anything other than accept the medical advice, and we have accepted it to the letter—whenever it has been offered to us, we have taken it.

I am also extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend, who was a former Secretary of State for Defence, for confirming that the Government, the chiefs and all those responsible for the well-being of our men and women soldiers, sailors and airmen have an absolute duty of care. That is our cardinal responsibility, whether in peace or at war.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North–East): I accept without reservation the Minister's good faith on this matter. Will he confirm that the information that he has given today was available in his Department not later than 19 July in a memorandum entitled "Briefing Note for Researchers—No. 3", which contains a summary saying that

"a wide range of organophosphate compounds were extensively used by British personnel during Operation GRANBY"?

Why was that information not provided to the House before it rose for the summer recess?

Does the Minister agree that the circumstances which prompted today's statement constitute a substantial humiliation for his Department, and have been the source of wholly unnecessary anger, frustration and distress to Gulf war veterans and their families?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for his kind words—more grateful than he will understand. What was in the memorandum, why that information did not come through properly and clearly to Ministers and why the House was not informed earlier are issues that will be covered in the investigation under the direction of the permanent under-secretary. The findings will be made available to the House, so the hon. and learned Gentleman will be able to see them. A grave error was made, and we must get to the bottom of it so as to ensure that it does not happen again.

The hon. and learned Gentleman asked whether this was a humiliation. I have been through so many humiliations as a very junior Minister and as a slightly less junior Minister, that I regard coming to the House and making a statement on a matter such as this not as a humiliation, but as an evolving pattern of knowledge.

I must emphasise to the hon. and learned Gentleman that America has spent millions of dollars on research, which, although valuable, has provided no real answers. The American Government may have approached these matters differently from us, but it has always been with a view to finding the right and proper answers.

Both Governments have come to the inevitable conclusion, on the best scientific and medical advice available, that the only way to proceed is to undertake these two detailed epidemiological studies. I accept that that will cause frustration, and will not please the veterans who feel ill. It is a serious matter of great concern when a doctor is unable to tell people who feel very ill what is wrong with them.

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): May I tell my hon. Friend the Minister that his statement is an enormous step forward for all those who have been concerned about Gulf veterans? On the Granada Television programme "The Line", did he say that no veteran or his or her family should be suffering hardship? May I also draw to his attention the plight of the Hill family—who live in my constituency—about whom I have already written to him? They are suffering great hardship. Would it be possible to pay them some interim compensation benefit?

Mr. Soames: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that case with me; I shall investigate it thoroughly.

[Mr. Soames]

As he may know, the Ministry of Defence is in exactly the same position on the matter of compensation as any other employer in the land. Were a claim for compensation to be made against the Ministry of Defence and were it to be upheld by a court, we would, of course, have to pay compensation.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Madam Speaker, I intervene briefly as the honorary parliamentary adviser to the Royal British Legion. Is the Minister aware that the use of organophosphates much more widely than was previously reported is seen as an extremely important issue by many veterans of the Gulf war? What estimate has he now made of the number of service men and women who were exposed to the effects of organophosphates during their service in the Gulf? Again, is he claiming that we have nothing at all to learn from the United States—even from the President's commission of inquiry into the very sensitive set of issues involved?

Finally, what action is the Minister taking, in consultation with the Royal British Legion, to make it easier for people who are invited to attend medical examinations to do so? Is he aware that many of them have had great difficulties—I am talking in many cases about people who are seriously ill—in getting to and from these examinations?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising those issues, I shall deal first with his last point.

I know that the right hon. Gentleman is an honorary adviser to the Royal British Legion, and that it is extremely grateful to him for that assistance. The other day, I met the Director-General of the Royal British Legion and asked him to provide me with a note of what we could reasonably do to help in the matter. I received the note two days ago, and I have asked for it to be carefully examined. I hope that I shall receive proposals on how I can help people overcome that difficulty.

On the right hon. Gentleman question on the United States and what lessons we have learnt, I have discussed the issue at great length with all the relevant people who are my opposite numbers in America. In their view, organophosphates do not appear to play a major role. We have liaised with them very carefully on the matter. I should tell the right hon. Gentleman that all the research by the Americans has merely confirmed to them that they must now embark on a much more detailed epidemiological study, which is what is occurring at King's college, London.

On the right hon. Gentleman's other points, on the nature and extent of use of OPs, I can only assure him that Group Captain Coker and his staff have been through all the records of every person who has been through the programme. From those records, they have found 54 people who need to be re-examined because of evidence of OP-type symptoms. That work is continuing, and they will be afforded the best care that we are able to give them.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): The House will welcome the readiness with which the Ministry of Defence now discloses any new evidence or information available on the very complex subject of so-called "Gulf war syndrome". The Minister's statement today is timely, because tomorrow the Defence Select Committee will again take evidence on the subject. Like the Ministry of Defence, the Committee preserves an open mind on whether Gulf war syndrome exists. The issue will clearly stay on our agenda for at least the three years that it will take to conduct the welcome epidemiological surveys.

Now that my hon. Friend has disclosed the extent to which the United States is co-operating with us on the research, will he tell us how much the Americans will contribute to the cost of the research here, and how much money we shall contribute to research over there? Will he explain why, in per capita terms, 100 times more Gulf veterans in the American armed forces than in our own are reporting symptoms of Gulf war syndrome?

My hon. Friend has told us how many veterans have reported for medical assessment. How many still await medical assessment? In addition, how many of those who have been recalled as a result of the recent disclosure of the use of organophosphate pesticides have been back for a medical assessment, and how many await assessment?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, the Chairman of the Select Committee, whose work and report we greatly value. I understand and accept that the Committee will want to follow the matter closely over the next few years. Officials from my Department are looking forward to seeing his Committee tomorrow to consider the matters in greater detail.

I understand that the cost of the programme of epidemiological research at King's college amounts to $865,000. I am not sure how much we are spending on research in America. As I have said, we have unfettered access to all American Government research programmes through the generosity of the United States Administration.

As my hon. Friend knows, there is, at present, no evidence of any specific syndrome associated with service in the Gulf war. Approximately 20,000 United States veterans have been through the assessment programme. We should bear it in mind that the United States sent 500,000-plus troops to the Gulf—

Mr. Alfred Morris: Seven hundred thousand.

Mr. Soames: The United States sent 700,000 troops to the Gulf, and we sent 50,000. The United States has no national health service, but it has an excellent Veterans Administration. I cannot account for the disparity in the numbers. Some 921 veterans have been through our medical assessment programme. Following a trawl of the records, 54 have been recalled in connection with the use of organophosphates. Some 200 remain to be seen, and 97 have failed for the third time to show up.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): In welcoming the statement and the decent way in which it was made, may I remind the Minister of the cases of two of my constituents—Mr. Doyle of Buckley and Mr. Turnbull of Garden City—that are now before him? They suffered distressing illnesses as a consequence of their experiences in the Gulf.

Will the Minister meet those two constituents and me, so that we can hear first hand how soon they might have compensation and whether it will be before their illnesses

become worse? They suffer from bleeding gums, breathing difficulties, loss of concentration and bronchitic problems. One of them has also suffered the failure of his business. Our fine Gulf soldiers now suffer injustice. We look to the Minister for speedy action.

Mr. Soames: I am certainly prepared to see the hon. Gentleman to discuss those matters. If he would be good enough to let me have again the details of his constituents, I shall have their cases looked into. However, the hon. Gentleman should direct his inquiries to the war pensions people. Subject to all other things being equal, they appear to be entitled to war pensions. I have already made our position on compensation plain, but I should be happy to see the hon. Gentleman to go through those cases.

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): May I commend my hon. Friend on the consistent good sense that he has applied to this sensitive matter? I particularly applaud the openness with which he made his statement and his willingness to admit that there are new factors that may or may not be relevant to the medical studies to be carried out. I declare an interest as co-chairman of the Friends of Medical Research in the House. I am particularly glad that the Medical Research Council is now involved, as well as the Royal College of Physicians.

Having said that, I am pleased that my hon. Friend is liaising closely with the United States authorities and their health investigation programme. Now that, in a spirit of openness, he has placed in the Library more details about the inoculation programmes, will he give the House an assurance that he will correlate the differences between the regimes of the United States and the United Kingdom?

May I also introduce a new factor that I do not expect my hon. Friend to answer this afternoon, and ask him to look at the French inoculation regime? It should be possible to acquire meaningful scientific information by taking cohorts from those three nationalities that served so ably in the Gulf.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, not least as he took part in the conflict, and is aware of the difficulties that ensued. I am grateful to him for what he said about the Medical Research Council, which has given us valuable and essential advice. On liaison with the United States, I can confirm that work is under way to compare the vaccination regimes of the United States and the United Kingdom. They were slightly different, because the intelligence assessments made by each side differed slightly.

As for working with the French, the Surgeon-General has been in contact with his French opposite number. I assure my hon. Friend that we shall continue to liaise with the French to ascertain whether they have anything helpful to bring to our important investigations.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Although I personally accept the good faith of the Minister, I hope that the under-secretary's report will reveal what happened to the cascade of precise parliamentary questions that flowed from the House on the subject. Were they casually dismissed? I have an unpalatable but constructive suggestion. If the Minister wants to get to the truth, he really should ask Patricia Doyle or Nicola Cherry to go to Iraq, where they will be well received by Dr. Mubarak, the Iraqi Minister of Health, who, incidentally, is a Kurd. He is a distinguished doctor, with whom I discussed the matter at considerable length three years ago in Baghdad. The Iraqis suffered too, and they may have a good deal of crucial information about organophosphates.

Mr. Soames: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Clearly, it has been an unacceptable failure on a serious matter. The permanent under-secretary will conduct a detailed examination, the findings of which will be made available to the House at the first opportunity. Of course I shall pass on the hon. Gentleman's proposal to Dr. Doyle and Professor Cherry.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (South Derbyshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the most distressing aspects of the matter for those of us involved is to watch the deterioration of ex-service men and women who served in the Gulf? Three or four years ago, they were capable of holding down jobs, but now they require extensive hospital treatment. Much of their concern is that they do not know the reason for their suffering. I cannot believe that my hon. Friend, who, by his statement, has shown himself to be an honourable and decent man, really means them to drag him through the courts in order to get some compensation.

Is my hon. Friend aware that nearly 400 people have already been awarded war pensions, and several hundred more applications are in the pipeline? The War Pensions Agency is well ahead of the Ministry of Defence in accepting that the illness has some connection with Gulf war service, and his statement today establishes that. Will he please reconsider his answer to our hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) and consider some interim compensation payment to those who were hurt?

Mr. Soames: First, I congratulate my hon. Friend on her doughty support for the veterans, and thank her for the detailed and courteous manner in which she has corresponded with me. However, there really is no evidence of negligence on the part of the Ministry of Defence. One reason why this extremely important survey needs to be carried out is to find out why those people are ill. I truly accept the frustration and personal anguish of those who cannot find the reason for their illness. The only way in which we can get to the bottom of the matter is by genuine, rigorous scientific work that will reach a proper conclusion, and by using all the abilities and facilities that we have to liaise with all other people who are doing the work. That we will do; we will get to the bottom of the matter. Meanwhile, I am afraid that I cannot agree with her final point.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Is the Minister aware that, less than a month ago, one of my constituents received a letter from his Department that said:

"Whatever information there is concerning your injections is on that document"—

that is, the personal medical folder? It went on:

"I have to remind you that certain injections and medication were administered during the Gulf War Campaign which were classified secret. Any such substances would not be listed on your medical documents and in view of the classification I do not have access to them".

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

Are we to assume that, as a result of today's statement, all people like my constituent will be informed of what was contained in any injections that they received, that that information will be given to their doctors and legal advisers, and that apologies will be sent to Gulf veterans for the undue pain and distress they suffered as a result of being refused the knowledge of what was pumped into their bodies?

Mr. Soames: If the hon. Gentleman will be good enough to let me have his constituent's details, I will certainly look into them. Exactly the point that I hope I made clear in my statement is that I am releasing today all the information relating to the vaccination of our troops during the Gulf war, which was previously withheld for very good, sound operational reasons. Such considerations have now passed, for a variety of reasons. The hon. Gentleman's constituent is perfectly entitled to know with what he was injected, although he would have been injected only on the basis of informed consent.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): May I thank my hon. Friend for the humanity and sensitivity of his statement and the answers that he has given, to which I have listened very closely? I invite him to look forward, to ensure not only that medical record keeping is improved but that we press on with new methods of chemical and biological defence, continue work at the prevention and life sciences division of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency at Porton Down, do not lose work on replacing piridostigmine with physostigmine, and increase training at the nuclear, biological and chemical centre at Winterbourne Gunner, for the benefit of our troops and in order to maintain Britain's position as the world leader in nuclear, chemical and biological defence.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has been a tremendous champion not only of the armed forces but of some of their less popular institutions, of which from time to time Porton Down has been one. It is a world centre of excellence, and will be grateful for his support. I can confirm that the remarkable work done at Porton Down will be continued, and that all of us who are graduates of Porton Down in one way or another want that training to continue at a very high level.

One of the cardinal lessons of the Gulf conflict concerns record keeping. A great deal of the trouble, difficulty and uncertainty would have been allayed if medical records had been better kept. The scenario was extremely fast-moving and very difficult. People were moving at a great pace from location to location. The speed at which the armoured brigades moved across country was devastating to behold—the conflict represented old-fashioned warfare on a huge scale.

We have to find a better way to keep records. The American Surgeon-General has shown me a dog tag that is being developed, on which there are a number of microchips. In future, if the programme works—I cannot envisage us not wanting to subscribe to it—it is hoped that a soldier receiving any form of treatment, immunisation or whatever on the battlefield would merely enter his dog tag into a machine that would mark it, so that all the material and information was immediately retrievable. Record keeping is of the first importance, and we are doing a very great deal to ensure that, if we had to do it again, we would be well prepared.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): Is the Minister aware that I entirely accept that he and his fellow Ministers were unaware of the organophosphate situation at the time they made their statements both to the Defence Select Committee and to the House? However, the fact remains that the House and the Defence Select Committee, at the time it was compiling its interim report, were seriously misled about the facts.

Does the Minister understand the dangerous nature of all organophosphate compounds, and the fact that a difference in degree is all that distinguishes them from nerve agents? Will he give the House an assurance that not only the vaccination records, but details of all the medication any troops in the Gulf received, will be made available to their general practitioners? I hope the Minister will accept my view that misleading the House is one thing, but misleading sick former soldiers' medical consultants is entirely another, and should never happen again.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he has said—I really am—and I will pass on what he said to my noble Friend, who will share my gratitude. I understand the seriousness of what happened. It is, as I said—and we all feel this—a grave failing that must be rectified.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether I understood about organophosphates. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), who is a champion of those who were affected in the sheep dip scenario, and who came to see me in a previous incarnation at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, knows well that I am extraordinarily aware of the question of OPs and that, for that reason, environmental health personnel in the military are well and effectively trained, know how those items are to be dealt with, and know the respect and care that they need in handling. I wish to reassure the House that all those involved in environmental health in the British Army are thoroughly trained in that regard.

On the question of GPs, I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam), and he has my absolute assurance that GPs will have—and, I hope, have previously had—whatever information they need.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): Like right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House, I deeply appreciate the statement that my hon. Friend has made today, his obvious sincerity and concern and the experience that he has in such matters. I do not mean to embarrass him by returning to the question of compensation, but there is a peculiar symmetry about the illnesses. One sees one person after another with something in common that is due to a common source or sources. Those people have one thing in common, as my hon. Friend is aware, because they served in the same theatre of warfare.

That being so, will my hon. Friend consider that there are perhaps ways and means to get over his difficulty? For example, is he aware of the difficulties facing those who suffered from a blood infection with the HIV virus who were also suffering from haemophilia? The haemophiliacs had to take a case to the Department of Health. Is he aware that the problem was solved by the setting up of a special fund, and that that absolved the Department of Health—rightly—of any responsibility?

Will my hon. Friend please consider ways to deal with this problem, because it will be some years—as he has said—before the mission of further research is completed? In that time, those who are ill will deteriorate, as has been pointed out by many right hon. and hon. Members. Surely there must be some measure of natural justice that will help to solve that problem.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. He raises an extraordinarily important point, but no compensation claims have yet been pursued by lawyers for claimants and no writs have been served, although a list of 1,195 names of potential claimants has been lodged with the MOD. That list provides the symptoms or disease claimed to have been experienced by each person since the Gulf war, without specific allegations of negligence or even causation. The symptoms range from depression, nausea, headaches, fatigue, lapse of concentration, coughs and chest pains to cancer.

If and when any or all of those potential claims were to be pursued with specific allegations of causation and negligence, the Department would pay compensation to whomever it was legally due. I will pay careful attention to the points addressed by my right hon. Friend, and, if I may, I will write to him in greater detail.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Minister review the question of compensation, because he will recall that, in a civil case not too long ago, he was the Minister I approached, together with people in my constituency, to deal with people whose land had been poisoned by Coalite with dioxins? It was a two-year-long campaign. At the time, it was said that they would have to go through the courts to get compensation. Following that deputation, which the Minister will recall, he promised to help to get the compensation sorted out in one way or another. The net result was that an ex gratia payment was made to the farmers in my constituency, so they did not have to go to court.

The Minister cannot avoid responsibility for different cases when it suits him. The truth is that compensation can be sorted out. The right hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) cited an example in which the Government played a leading role. If it is okay for farmers and for others, it should be okay to pay early compensation to the veterans.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman; I well remember the time he brought a delegation to see me—

Mr. Skinner: There were 40 of them.

Mr. Soames: Yes, 40 of them, in a room for about 10.

I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that any Gulf veteran who can be shown to be suffering from illness caused by the Department's negligence will be entitled to compensation in line with common law principles.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): My hon. Friend will be aware of how the military looks after its ex-service men; its record is impeccable. It is impeccable because scientific and medical evidence is always necessary before action is taken. We need think only of the problems that followed the Japanese prisoners and others to realise the record that exists. However, it is right that action should be taken only on the basis of facts that can be proven, as otherwise we would open up the most appalling can of worms, going back to the second world war.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who raises an important point. I concur with what he said, and qualify it only by saying that I think it extremely important that the veterans understand that we understand, truly, the anguish they feel in the position they are in, and therefore our absolute determination to try to get to the bottom of matters—but, as my hon. Friend said, only by proper, rigorous and scientific assessment of the facts and then coming to as proper, decent and early a conclusion as we can.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is not a two-way process involved? First, there is the readiness of the armed forces always to go into action, as was the case six and a half years ago, in a justified action against criminal oppression. Secondly, there is the readiness of the Government, at all times, to help those veterans who have been seriously harmed as a result of military action. Is there not bound to have been much concern, frustration and, indeed, anger among the veterans simply to get the MOD to get anywhere near the situation that has been explained to the House today?

On compensation, if the Minister really believes that those veterans should be expected to go through long court actions, thereby adding further difficulty and delay, he has misread the feeling on both sides of the House. There is undoubtedly a strong wish, which has been expressed today by Conservative and, now, Labour Members, that justice should be done for those war veterans who carried out their duties so honourably.

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman was on to a good point at the beginning of his remarks. Clearly, the health, wealth and security of our troops and veterans are of prime concern to the Government, the chiefs and all those involved. As the hon. Gentleman rightly implied, it is essential that the fighting troops of the British armed forces have confidence that they will be properly looked after in the event of injury or illness.

I also accept that it is important that we try to come to as speedy a conclusion as we can; but we cannot do so without having the proper, rigorous, scientific facts upon which to base our case. That does not alter the fact that I agree with the hon. Gentleman that, on both sides of the House, there runs a golden chain of genuine sympathy and concern for those people who find themselves in a bad state.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I noticed that the last two Members I called, although they raised implied questions, asked no direct questions. The interventions are becoming statements. I must have brisk questions. The statement has been running for an hour.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): My hon. Friend's statement is very welcome, for this reason among others: it has drawn attention to shortcomings in the way in which his Department has answered questions from Members of Parliament, and, indeed, from the Select Committee.

In that light, would my hon. Friend consider looking at the procedure adopted for answering questions in a wider field, to prevent the same thing from happening elsewhere?

[Mr. Keith Mans]

The fact remains that one of the problems that have resulted from this difficulty is that many people who feel that their disease may have been a consequence of what happened in the Gulf have lost confidence—perhaps unjustifiably—in the Ministry of Defence's ability to discover the true reasons for what is wrong with them.

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend makes an important point. There have clearly been unacceptable failings and shortcomings, which will be dealt with by the permanent under-secretary's inquiry. The results will be made available to the House as soon as that can decently be done, and we shall certainly be looking at the way in which information comes in for parliamentary questions.

I emphasise that, in my judgment and my experience of the Ministry of Defence, this particular failure was indeed an aberration. The advice that we are given is nearly always impeccable and of the highest standard. On this occasion, however, there has been a grievous shortcoming, which must be dealt with. I very much take my hon. Friend's point, especially what he said about confidence.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Does the Minister not accept that, while the first questions about organophosphates may well have been asked in 1994, questions about the unique health hazards involved in the Gulf war were asked as early as 1991—in January, I believe? It was made clear then that depleted-uranium-tipped shells were being used in huge quantities, and that that could lead to radioactive dust across the battlefield. Immediately after the war, the possibility was raised that a cocktail of carcinogenic chemicals was coming from the oil wells, and later the possibility of damage caused by injections was raised.

Is it not true that the many Members of Parliament who raised those issues in 1991, 1992 and 1993 were treated to complacent and indifferent answers by the Minister's Department? This study should have begun in 1991: it is now five years late, and veterans who, in many cases, lost their health as a result of that war will receive their compensation 10 years after they should have received it. Is that not a disgrace? Should not the Minister re-examine his statement, and apologise for ignoring questions about those three other health hazards that were tabled as early as January 1991?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman spoiled an initially good case with a piece of histrionic rant. He spoke of depleted uranium and the carcinogenic effects of burning oil wells; it is interesting to note that there is no sign of any illness among the indigenous populations of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, who would have been expected to be the first to suffer. As for the hon. Gentleman's mention of complacency, I hope that he does not think that I am complacent. I am not, and nor is my Department.

We are determined to get to the bottom of this, but it is, of necessity, a long-term programme. The minute that serious concerns were raised about the health of Gulf veterans, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes, the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, established the medical assessment programme. I think that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) will agree that that programme was set up at almost the same time as the Americans established their medical assessment programme. We have almost run in tandem.

I am not saying that what we have done is perfect. I have no doubt that, with hindsight, we will be shown that—as with all things—we could have done it better; but we have had to do it guided by the light of the best advice, the best science and the best possible interests of all those young men and women who went to the Gulf and will soldier in the future.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I believe that it is correct that the force gathered in the Gulf in 1991 was the largest allied force to be gathered since the second world war. Have any comparable studies been made of health and sickness rates, both in theatre and when those concerned have returned to the United Kingdom, in the case of comparable campaigns?

Will my hon. Friend reassure me that it remains a duty and a priority of all commanders, up to and including the Ministry of Defence, to look after the health and welfare of their service personnel, for both humanitarian and compassionate reasons?

Finally, may I tell my hon. Friend that, although I welcome these further steps, among the many people I have known who served in the Gulf, I have yet to meet one who either believes that he has Gulf war syndrome or knows of anyone who believes himself to be suffering from it?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. His experience in the Gulf war has always been of importance in the questioning of Government policy in the Gulf. As a former serving officer, he knows—and I can confirm—that the health and welfare of those under one's command are a prime charge: there is no more important obligation for an officer or non-commissioned officer.

On my hon. Friend's first question, no comparable survey has been undertaken in this country. The United States of America undertook a similar epidemiological study, although not with the same parameters or scientific rigour, and found no increase in mortality, hospitalisation or illness among those who went to the Gulf as compared with those who did not. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support in our deliberations on this extremely difficult matter.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I accept the reasons given by the Minister for the House having been misled, but will he discuss with the Prime Minister the fact that, if I were to have an Adjournment debate tonight on pesticides, outside the stewardship of the Ministry of Defence, the relevant Minister would stand up and say that there was no problem? There should be regard across the Government to the fact that Ministers and civil servants in other Departments are pooh-poohing the problem posed by the pesticides, named in the Surgeon-General's report, that are being used recklessly in industry and in domestic situations.

It is time that Government Departments other than the Ministry of Defence—the Department of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and the

Department for Education and Employment—recognised that there is genuine concern about the pesticides being used in the domestic as well as the military sphere.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, not least because he is a genuine champion of the veterans and the armed forces. On OPs, however, I find myself in respectful disagreement with him.

As the hon. Member for North Cornwall knows—he knows more about the subject than anyone else in the House—all the Government Departments are extremely well informed on those matters. When I was in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, it was extremely well informed. The Health and Safety Executive, the Department of Health, the Ministry of Defence and all the other Departments liaise regularly to ensure that exactly such problems as the hon. Gentleman outlined cannot arise. I take his point, however, and will ensure that it is passed on.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): In our understandable sympathy for those who served in the Gulf and have an illness, is there not a danger of confusing a correlation between service in the Gulf and an illness, with a causal link? We should not be deflected from a proper study of the medical and scientific evidence and reach a verdict prematurely.

Mr. Soames: I am very grateful to my hon. and learned Friend, who has effectively hit the nail on the head. That is exactly the point about the scientific research. The Americans, having chased valuable but often will-o'-the-wisp research projects, have come back to the conclusion that not causal research but the careful and detailed, albeit lengthy and frustrating, work of epidemiology surveys is required to get to the bottom of the problem. Those surveys will come up with the answer, from which it may be possible to do the causal research that may well be necessary later.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): If the Gulf war was repeated, would the delivery of OPs be effected as it was in 1990 and 1991, or, bearing in mind what we have learnt since 1991, especially in relation to sheep dip, would different means of delivering OPs be employed—or would they not be used at all? I seek an assurance because the Minister told us that, except on one occasion, the rules for the delivery of OPs were followed.

Mr. Soames: I assure the hon. Gentleman that substantial lessons have been learnt from the campaign. They will be applied not only in respect of the holding and delivery of stock and the functioning of the supply chain but in respect of the training of environmental health personnel and doctors and of the preparation of people for what is required.

However, British forces in the desert faced a real and substantial health hazard, especially from fly-borne diseases, about which the hon. Gentleman knows. In the last war, the 8th Army suffered seriously from such diseases. It is important that we should keep matters in proportion. I agree with what lies behind the hon. Gentleman's question, and I assure him that all the lessons that needed to be learnt have been learnt.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the most important aspects of his statement was his explanation of the degree of co-operation between the United Kingdom and the United States? Will he give further detail on the extent to which research runs in parallel and the extent to which it is different, notwithstanding that we use different drugs? How much of the research is common, and how much cross-checking is possible?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend is right to say that the degree of co-operation is important. Contact about the work and cross-checking is almost daily. The research programmes are going to be carefully co-ordinated in respect of the epidemiological surveys. However, to date most of the American research has been causal, and, as we now know, that is not as valuable as we might have hoped.

I assure my hon. Friend that co-operation is extremely close, to the extent that a British officer has recently commenced sitting on the American research board that supervises the matter. The Americans have been good enough to accept a Royal Army Medical Corps lieutenant-colonel into the Department of Defense Gulf health research team, where he will be able to gain and pass to us most valuable oversight, of which we shall make the best use.

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): On the use of organophosphate pesticides, can the Minister confirm that none of the British service men involved in delousing Iraqi prisoners of war was issued with protective clothing? One of those service men is my constituent Mervyn Gray, who has been unable to work since his return from the Gulf. In those circumstances, how was it possible for the Minister's inquiry to conclude that there was no inappropriate use of organophosphate chemicals?

Mr. Soames: I know that the hon. Gentleman has followed the matter closely; he and I debated it at the time of the statement on the defence estimates. Environmental health personnel and trained regimental hygiene duty staff are trained to use personal protection equipment at all times when using pesticides. The investigation noted the allegation that the hon. Gentleman and others have made that no PP equipment was available, but could not substantiate it. If he has detailed evidence, I should be very grateful if he would let me have it forthwith.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): The Minister has been kind enough to mention the all-party group that deals with organophosphate pesticides that I convene. In answer to his unsolicited testimonial, I absolve him personally of misleading the House in his answers to our questions.

Will the Minister review his answer to the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie), which disclaimed any negligence by his Department? He knows that, as long as ago as 1987, an explicit statement was sent out warning of the dangers of using OPs in certain circumstances. If his Department had, at every level, including commanders in the field, followed the advice of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Department of Health and the Health and Safety Executive, there would now be no question of anyone being even suspected of having been affected by exposure to OPs.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that point. I cannot resile from the answer that I gave my hon. Friend. I repeat that any Gulf veteran who can be shown to be suffering from illness caused by the Department's negligence will be entitled to compensation in line with common law principles.

Armoured Vehicles (Indonesia)

4.44 pm

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

the written answers from the President of the Board of Trade yesterday, revealing that he was issuing licences for the sale of armoured vehicles to the Government of Indonesia.

This is a serious and specific important matter. In columns *29* and *30* of today's *Hansard*, there are two written answers. One states that the President of the Board of Trade is issuing a licence for the export of 50 armoured vehicles and associated equipment to the Indonesian army, and a variety of vehicles to the Indonesian police, including seven Tactica water canon. That news reaches the House on the day that two distinguished civil rights campaigners are in Oslo to receive the Nobel peace prize for their work in East Timor. It is a disgrace that we should learn such important and controversial news by means of a written answer in *Hansard* today.

The matter is important, because, leaving aside the occupation of East Timor, this summer there were street demonstrations in the capital of Indonesia, Djakarta, in support of the democratic opposition party. A newspaper report stated:

"Onlookers said soldiers hit people indiscriminately, threw stones and bottles, and smashed car windows.

Many people were seen leaving the area with blood streaming down their faces and one person was reported to have been run over by an armoured car and killed. PDI organisers said more than 100 marchers were injured."

In his answers, the President of the Board of Trade says that he issued the licences after consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence. My right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) wrote to the Secretary of State for Defence about exports of equipment to Indonesia after his visit to Djakarta in July. On 3 July, the Secretary of State replied:

"We do not export equipment likely to be used for internal repression."

What do Ministers think water canon are for? They are certainly not for watering the gardens of the presidential palace.

On my visit to Djakarta two years ago, it became obvious that journalists, including newspaper editors, are frightened to criticise the Government because their licences to print newspapers are suspended if they do. I believe that the House, as the mother of parliaments, should be concerned when our Government actively support the suppression of normal democratic values and civil rights. That is why I seek leave.

Madam Speaker: I have listened carefully to the right hon. Gentleman. As he knows, I must give my decision without giving any reasons. I am afraid that I do not consider that the matter that he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20 and I therefore cannot submit his application to the House.

BILL PRESENTED

Government of Wales

Dr. John Marek, supported by Mr. Alex Carlile, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Mr. Paul Flynn, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mr. John McAllion and Mr. Dafydd Wigley, presented a Bill to make provision for the future government of Wales and for the establishment of a parliament for Wales, to be known as Senedd; to make provision as respects Wales concerning public bodies, the protection of the consumer and the environment, the administration of justice, broadcasting and relations with the European Union; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 January, and to be printed [Bill 53].

Licensing (Reform)

4.47 pm

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to reform the system of liquor licensing.

The Bill's purpose is to reform licensing law by abolishing the system of permitted or opening hours for licensed premises while retaining sufficient safeguards to ensure that the public in the vicinity are not unreasonably disturbed. It would abolish the absolute discretion of licensing justices to control the establishment or conduct of licensed premises and abolish children's certificates.

Our present licensing laws are complicated, archaic and confusing. Few people understand them; they need urgent reform. The historic and traditional values of our pubs need to be set in modern times. The current Licensing Act dates from 1961, when the law was last reviewed. It was consolidated in 1964, and has no fewer than 204 sections and 11 active schedules. There have been numerous amendments, and another 17 sections have been added. So confusing has it become that a key section on late-night extension is now known as section 78ZA. From a purely logistical point of view, the legislation needs reform.

Piecemeal reform is no longer acceptable. A comprehensive review is necessary. The present law is antiquated and outdated. It contains whole sections which were included in one of the first Alehouse Acts passed at the time of George IV, which was also known as the Intoxicating Liquor Licensing Act 1828. In those days, there were closing times, not permitted hours. The closing times were intended merely to prevent potential disturbance at night and during Sunday services, although alehouses could open at all other times.

However, the Licensing Act 1872 forms the basis of the current law. Large sections of the Act are still in force and have not been substantially repealed or amended since that time. Procedure for the granting, renewal and transfer of licences has not substantially changed. It has to be remembered that, in those times, the vast majority of licences were granted to individuals who ran alehouses, inns, refreshment houses and off-licences. There were mainly local breweries with local tenants. There were no national breweries, retail groups, themed bars or restaurant chains, and there was no training or supervision. The laws which were in force then are hardly suited to the modern licensing needs of the 21st century.

The Bill attempts to update the legislation. It first deals with opening or permitted hours. Permitted hours are a hangover from the first world war and the requirement to get the munitions workers back to the factories in the afternoons. They are truly an anachronism, and they serve no useful purpose. Even the Association of Chief Police Officers has recommended that permitted hours as such be abolished. In its recent submission to the Home Office, it pointed out that removing the flashpoints of 11.30 pm and 2.30 am when pubs and clubs turned out would dramatically reduce violent confrontation and make policing easier during those periods.

The Bill seeks to abolish permitted hours on licensed premises, while ensuring that local residents are protected from unreasonable noise and disturbance. Pubs and clubs will be able to open when they want. The market will dictate when they open. Justices will have the power to issue an order for a closing period when they think it appropriate. The police and the licensee will have the opportunity to appeal against such an order or ask for it to be revoked.

Complaints are sometimes made that licensing magistrates behave like barons in their own lands. The present system lacks transparency and leads to wide variations between benches. It just cannot make sense for Birmingham, which has twice the population of Nottingham, to have only half the number of late licences that Nottingham has. Such variations highlight the inadequacies of the present Act. Similarly, the Bill will stop people who want to drink later rushing from one licensing area to another, which permits later drinking, say, during the Christmas period.

What is more, the second focus of the Bill challenges the absolute discretion of the justices. In the modern leisure society, decisions on the viability of premises and their attraction to customers should properly be taken by the companies and operators who are risking their money, together with the appropriate planning authority, which, in every case, would give permission for any new venture. The control of the justices has been criticised as too dictatorial, and out of keeping with modern business needs.

Removal of the absolute authority of justices, but allowing them to refuse applications for inappropriate or unsuitable premises, has long been canvassed, as has the requirement for justices to give clear written reasons for refusing to grant a licence, to give the applicants to put things right if they can. I therefore propose that the discretion of the justices to grant or refuse a new licence should be limited to those areas outlined in the Bill. That will retain proper controls, but allow new entrants to the licensed trade to compete with established premises if they think that they have suitable premises and are fit and proper to hold a licence.

To those who say that the Bill will open the floodgates to new licences, I point out that the statistics show that the number of public houses is falling, not as a result of unfair competition from within but because there are competing leisure activities elsewhere, in particular home consumption. One cannot have it both ways. Either there are too many licensed outlets or they are not of the type that the customer wants. That is not a choice that justices should make. The choice of the consumer is clearly paramount.

The third proposal in the Bill is one which I believe will be widely welcomed. Children's certificates have been a disaster. They were introduced as a deregulation measure, but quickly evolved into an additional form of licence, with procedures for application, complicated requirements from licensing committees, and considerable extra work for clerks and court administrators. So inhibiting are some of the conditions imposed that recent Home Office statistics show that only 3.7 per cent. of the pubs in England and Wales have been granted certificates. In the past year, among 75,000 public houses, only a few more than 1,000 certificates were granted.

The city of York, as a matter of policy, does not entertain children's certificates. It relies on the good sense of local licensees and the police to ensure that children are allowed only in pubs with a suitable environment. In contrast to York, licensing benches across the country apply differing and restrictive conditions. In Birmingham,

[Mr. Paddy Tipping]

children's certificates exclude children in term time. One bench forbids children to sit on stools; no domines are allowed; children must be out of the line of sight of televisions. The list goes on. I believe that those judgments should properly be made by parents, not licensing benches.

Therefore, I propose to turn the burden of proof around and abolish the cumbersome and unpopular certificates. I propose that in their place, where necessary, a restriction order should be placed on unsuitable premises where it is felt appropriate that young children should not be allowed. The presence of young people under 14 is already permitted in a number of premises where alcohol is supplied and consumed, without creating problems of discipline.

Under-age drinking is and always has been a separate issue from that of allowing children under 14 in licensed premises. It is a hangover from the images evoked by Hogarth and others of youngsters in alehouses and gin palaces. The modern licensed outlet has clearly appealed more and more to families, who are inhibited from making full use of the facilities by the restrictions and the extra conditions imposed. They are unnecessary, and should be done away with.

This is a modest but necessary Bill. It has much support from bodies that take an interest in licensing. Many licensing magistrates acknowledge that the time for change has come. In today's society, there are ready opportunities to travel abroad. British residents are impressed by the cafés on the continent, which have become a symbol of the sort of place to which people can happily take their family. That trend exists here in Britain, and it is unstoppable.

In contrast, foreign visitors to Britain find our licensing laws bemusing. Like them, I have to confess that I am still not entirely clear where and when I can take my children into a pub. The Bill is not the final answer. The imminent general election means that it has little prospect of becoming law. The purpose of the Bill is to highlight the issue and raise its profile. The Bill is a vehicle for discussion and debate. It is merely a first step to comprehensive legislation—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order.

4.58 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman seek to oppose the Bill?

Mr. Mackinlay: Yes. I pick up where my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) concluded. He said that it was a matter for debate. He wanted to canvass the idea of licensing reform. That is perfectly legitimate, but I will not acquiesce by my silence in the approval of the Bill.

The arguments which my hon. Friend has advanced are driven largely by the industry, which has selfish interests that are not always the same as those of the community as a whole.

Although I fully accept that existing regulations and legislation are not ideal and that there is a case for a thorough review, such a review should be comprehensive, after a great deal of debate and discussion. There is a danger that, if we acquiesce in approval of a ten-minute Bill, we give a nod and a wink to various people who think that they need to make just one more shove, do some more extensive lobbying or use the Parliamentary Beer Club to get where they want, probably on the back of some wider or deeper, voluminous legislation. I think that that is wrong.

I listened carefully to the my hon. Friend's speech. I had no prior knowledge of his arguments, and I had hoped that they would relate to the problem of smuggling, which substantially disadvantages British industry and small businesses such as off-licences. My attention was focused, however, by his reference to market forces and to the growing and transformed leisure industry.

My hon, Friend also mentioned theme parks, and here I have to declare an interest: I live near a theme park, and it is a pain in the neck. The park started in a small way, but the interests of local residents and neighbours of such leisure interests are subordinated to the avaricious and selfish interests of many of those who run the leisure industry. I perceive those interests as the theme behind the Bill.

For that reason, I have to register my objection to what might, on the face of it, appear to be an innocuous change. The most rigorous examination is justified before the House, on the nod, acquiesces and grants leave to bring in such a Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Paddy Tipping, Mr. Eric Clarke and Mr. Alan Meale.

LICENSING (REFORM)

Mr. Paddy Tipping accordingly presented a Bill to reform the system of liquor licensing: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 February, and to be printed [Bill 52].

ESTIMATES DAY

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY, 1ST PART]

VOTE ON ACCOUNT: 1997-98

Class XVII, Vote 1

Government Information

[*Relevant documents: The Second Report from the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration of Session 1995–96 on Open Government (HC 84) and the First Special Report from the Committee of Session 1996–97 containing the Government Response thereto (HC 75).*]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That a sum, not exceeding £78,288,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for or towards defraying the charges for the year ending on 31st March 1998 for expenditure by the Office of the Minister for Public Service on the central management of the Civil Service; expenditure resulting from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's chairmanship of the BSE Implementation Committee; expenditure on privatisation of executive agencies; and certain other services.—[*Mr. Freeman.*]

5.2 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): This is the second debate this year that has been initiated by the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. The first was on the Child Support Agency and this one is on freedom of information. That is a clear sign of the breadth of the work and scope of the Select Committee. Today's debate stems from the Committee's report, published on 20 March 1996, on open government.

Currently there is in place a code of practice on access to Government information. The code came into effect on 4 April 1994. The effectiveness of the code is guaranteed by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, who acts as the mechanism for external review. The Select Committee is empowered to

"call Departments and Ministers to account for failure to supply information in accordance with the code."

The code has now been in operation for some two years and now might be an appropriate time to review its effectiveness.

I have no doubt that the code has strengthened the democratic process, and it has done so in at least three distinct ways. First, it has brought greater objectivity to personal files. Secondly, it has improved decision making both by Ministers and by public servants. Thirdly, it ensures better-informed debate. The White Paper, "Open Government", stated:

"At the heart of the Government's philosophy is a belief in the need to return to individual citizens the power and means to make their own choices and to determine their own priorities. The Government has insisted that public institutions exist to serve the individual, and not the other way about."

Few in this House would quarrel with that description. It is an entirely laudable objective and one that I support. The code goes a long way towards achieving that aim.

I am a late convert to the principle of freedom of information. I had previously believed that there are certain areas of Government activity that should remain secret, such activity being cloaked, as the Germans say, under "Nacht und Nebel". Indeed, it might reassure the House to learn that, even in countries that have freedom of information Acts, certain activities of Government remain secret. There clearly must be limits to the openness of government. No freedom of information regime grants completely unlimited access to all Government information; to allow such access would make government and responsible decision making impossible.

The code currently contains exemptions similar to those found in parliamentary legislation abroad. The House will be aware that one of the arguments most often used against freedom of information is that it will harm the frankness and the candour of decision making and thus damage the process of government. Clearly, that danger must be avoided; however, the code has, as one of its exemptions:

"Information whose disclosure would harm the frankness and candour of internal discussion".

At the end of the day, it is the ombudsman's responsibility to judge whether exemption has been properly used, or whether it is an excuse to deny the right to information.

The Select Committee has made it clear that it is now necessary to go much further than a code or, indeed, an Act of Parliament. We argue that there should be a change to the culture of public service, from an assumption of secrecy to an assumption of openness. We are therefore pleased to note that the Government have now agreed to revise the code in line with the Select Committee's recommendation, to make clear the principle of availability of information. I shall be interested to hear from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster whether he believes that that change is forthcoming and what further measures he proposes, to ensure that the civil service's understandable instinct for concealment is replaced by an instinct for disclosure.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): My hon. Friend spoke about "Nacht und Nebel"—night and fog—but surely that applies not only to civil servants, but to quasi-Government agencies, such as the Benefits Agency? How will his code of practice apply to such bodies?

Mr. Pawsey: I am grateful to my hon. Friend—his knowledge of German is, I suspect, equal to my own. The code of openness applies to the agencies as well: they are required to provide additional information as is thought necessary.

My argument is that the code remains only a code and does not go far enough. We should introduce a statutory right. We need an Act of Parliament to ensure that the citizen has a right of access, to see what lies on his or her file.

The Committee welcomed the fact that a public interest test was included in the code, which states:

"It should be considered whether any harm or prejudice arising from public disclosure is outweighed by the public interest in making information available".

It would be helpful, therefore, were we to read more evidence in the ombudsman's reports that civil servants are actively considering the public interest before refusing information.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I am interested in the fact that the hon. Gentleman

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

repeatedly mentions civil servants. He is aware that civil servants accept political and certainly day-to-day business direction from Ministers. That appears to be missing from his equation. I am not sure how or why.

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Lady intervenes relatively early in my speech—

Mrs. Dunwoody: Ah.

Mr. Pawsey: If she contains herself a little longer, she will find that I refer to Ministers being more open just as much as I believe that their civil servants should be more open.

One of the great benefits of freedom of information is the right that it gives citizens to know more about records that are maintained about them. Citizens should be able to read what a civil servant writes about them. The code is of recent inception and is not well known, so it is not well used. I hope that one of the by-products of the debate will be to draw attention to the existence of the code and give it greater publicity, so that the ombudsman receives more complaints.

Even if the debate attracts attention to the code, I do not believe that the code goes far enough. As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant), a code remains a code, and I believe that the citizen should be given much greater statutory rights.

Secondly, freedom of information might result in more comments being made informally and orally instead of in writing. I understand the point. It should not, however, be forgotten that decisions on individuals' files might have to be justified later. If the written documentation proves inadequate to justify a decision, the decision maker will be in difficulty. Recently, a Minister in Australia resigned precisely because there was no written audit trail to account for decisions that she had taken.

I shall now describe some of the benefits that result from open government. In the White Paper, the Government stated that open government was

"part of an effective democracy".

Targets and guarantees of service should be set out. Complaints procedures should be set down and publicised. The right to Government information is part of that culture change.

I am delighted that members of the Select Committee, who played an important part in gathering information, are present in the Chamber. When the Select Committee took evidence, it became clear that freedom of information Acts concentrate the bureaucratic mind. A minor example taken from Australia remains firmly in my mind and, I suspect, in the mind of hon. Members who heard it. In relation to an interview that took place prior to the introduction of the Freedom of Information Act in Australia, a note in the margin of a letter read—this may annoy the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody)—

"Not bad for a woman".

Clearly, after the Freedom of Information Act, such a comment would be unthinkable. When notes become readily available, prejudice and bigotry diminish.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley) *rose—*

Mr. Pawsey: I give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is an indefatigable member of the Select Committee and works exceedingly hard. I am pleased, but not surprised, to see him in his place.

Mr. Campbell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for those kind words.

Another point emerged from evidence that we took about the Australian experience. Let us say that there was a personal file on Mr. A. The Freedom of Information Act meant that any document could be obtained, so if a person wanted to make a comment about Mr. A. that they did not want to be read, they would write it on a sticky yellow post-it note and attach it to a document in the file. Then, if that document was requested, the yellow note was removed and the document handed over, but the real stuff was not in it. We found that that was happening in Australia. We want to watch carefully to ensure that it does not happen here.

Mr. Pawsey: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman. His memory of what takes place in Australia is good, and I acknowledge the strength of what he says.

Mr. Fabricant: A far more despicable example of such a practice occurred at the end of the second world war. The British and American authorities in Germany attached paper clips to files of some German prisoners of war who were known to be members of the Waffen-SS. If the paper clip was attached, it showed that they would work for the new occupying powers and would not be held to trial.

Mr. Pawsey: I am obliged to my hon. Friend. I should, however, remind my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) of the remarks that I made earlier about the audit trail. Obviously, if the audit trail is incomplete because post-it notes have been removed, the person responsible for the information must answer.

Mr. Michael Lord (Central Suffolk): My hon. Friend knows that, although the Committee's view may lean toward statute, some of us are not so keen on that route and believe that the code should be given longer to work. Is my hon. Friend aware that, before the debate, there was a statement from the Ministry of Defence about Gulf war syndrome?

Mr. Pawsey *indicated assent.*

Mr. Lord: The major problem was the lack of accurate records, which is relevant to what we are discussing. Does my hon. Friend agree that the thing that has struck the Committee most about our visit to Australia—and in much of our deliberations on this issue—is the difference between individuals' records, and the issue of making them available to individuals, and state papers, which fall into an entirely different category?

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend is right to make that point. He is another conscientious member of the Select

Committee; he is always present. He mentioned the Gulf war syndrome, and I believed that he was about to say that those who believe that they have been injured as a result of service in the Gulf war and those who believe that the Ministry of Defence has not dealt satisfactorily with their case, may be able to refer it to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, so that he can examine matters to discover whether there are any points that he should seize on. My hon. Friend has touched on an interesting subject.

I said that, with the introduction of the code and, I hope, the introduction of an Act, government would become more open. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire, I believe that to be of great benefit to the average citizen. It concerns me a great deal.

During our investigations, we learnt of a less helpful phenomenon—the development of what are called "fishing expeditions". They occurred when a pressure group or an Opposition Member of Parliament demanded substantial amounts of information—records, documents and papers. That operation is extremely expensive and time-consuming. If the experience of Australia is anything to go by, in many cases, that is unwarranted. Any freedom of information Act introduced in the United Kingdom would, therefore, have to take careful note of that possibility.

Government seeks to protect itself against the possibility of fishing expeditions. We were told in Australia that one method of achieving that was to take advantage of the exemption provided for Cabinet papers and Cabinet documents. To frustrate fishing expeditions—

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Wheeled through the Cabinet Office.

Mr. Pawsey: Exactly as the hon. Gentleman says, trolley-loads of documents were wheeled through the Cabinet Office—in one door and out of the other. They were then effectively protected from outside scrutiny.

My personal view is that the principal objective of a freedom of information Act should be to benefit the individual citizen and to give citizens the right to obtain information about their own specific cases. If Government and Ministers were more open, that would bring additional benefits and advantages to the man in the street. That was the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk (Mr. Lord) and by me in our references to Gulf war syndrome.

Another virtue of openness is the improved decision making that goes with it. As one Australian colourfully said in evidence to us,

"Sunlight is the best detergent."

A recent review of the operation of the FOI Act in Australia concluded:

"The Act has had a marked impact on the way agencies make decisions and the way they record information. The FOI Act has focused decision makers' minds on the need to base decisions on relevant factors and to record the decision making process. The knowledge that decisions and processes are open to scrutiny, including under an FOI Act, imposes a constant discipline on the public sector."

I must tell my right hon. Friend the Minister that I believe that that discipline would be just as effective in the United Kingdom as it is in Australia.

Mr. Lord: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a grave danger in comparing the operations of one nation with those of another, and trying to impose new legislation on one country simply because it exists in another country? He will remember that when we visited Australia, one of the reasons given for introducing the law was corruption. Many people mentioned corruption to us, and we were given the impression that that was quite widespread. That does not apply in this country.

Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that even though the statute exists in Australia, people there have found numerous ways of getting round it, blocking it and making life difficult at the decision-making level? Finally, does my hon. Friend acknowledge that several senior people in Australia, including some of those who had been responsible for introducing the legislation, admitted to us that in some cases it had made decision taking at the higher level more difficult?

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend raises some interesting points, but I am not sure that I go all the way with him. I believe that we can learn from the examples and experiences of other countries. I do not believe, however, that it is wise to transplant legislation from one country to another. There is virtue in learning from countries that have a democracy broadly similar to our own. Our Parliament was translated to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States—all countries that have FOI. I believe that, generally, FOI works well in those countries.

I am a late convert to FOI. I am a convert because I want additional power to be placed in the hands of the ordinary citizen. I want ordinary citizens to see what is written about them by civil servants. We Conservatives have a slogan: "Trust the people." I want that translated from a slogan to actuality. I want the people to enjoy that trust, and to see what is written about them. I am not convinced that what is written about them at present is always entirely fair, straight and honest. For that reason, I have become converted to the FOI regime.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): My hon. Friend knows that, unfortunately, I was unable to accompany the Committee to Australia. I do not know what reflections he might have on the important matter of health and safety, which was brought to my attention four or five years ago after a potentially disastrous accident involving a train carrying chemicals in my constituency. The train was derailed in open country; if it had been derailed in either of the towns on either side of the site of the accident, the result would have been cataclysmic.

This afternoon, as my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk (Mr. Lord) pointed out, we heard a grave statement from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces about Gulf war illness and the fact that inadequate—let us say just inadequate—replies were given to inquiries in the House in past years. That is an extremely grave matter, in which I am interested because of the affliction that has affected several farmers in my constituency and in the south-west, arising from the use of organophosphate dips for treating sheep. Health and safety is a very important matter of generic concern.

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend is a member of the Select Committee and plays a major part in its workings and deliberations. I am grateful to him for his intervention. He makes a valid point and argues my case better than I could.

[Mr. Pawsey]

A further benefit of FOI is that it results in better-informed public debate. Chairman Mao said, "Knowledge is power." I want that knowledge and power to be placed firmly in the hands of my fellow citizens.

Let me quote the words of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who, I hope, will speak in the debate. When he came before Committee, he said:

"In a parliamentary democracy it is extremely important that all those who take an interest . . . should know the facts behind a particular Government decision, the reasoning behind an administrative action, so that there can be informed debate."

My right hon. Friend was right. No one on the Select Committee would quarrel with what he said.

I believe—as does my right hon. Friend, I think—that open government makes better government. It gives less opportunity for mistakes to be swept under ministerial carpets or under the departmental carpet. It allows greater opportunity for righting wrongs and means that the people of this country would be even more fairly governed.

The Government have asked the ombudsman to consider complaints relating to the refusal of information covered under the terms of the code. The Select Committee supports that approach. So far—this comes back to my earlier point about the code being unknown—the ombudsman has received only 113 complaints. He has investigated and reported on 23, and 18 further complaints are under investigation. The ombudsman's reports on his investigations demonstrate how effective he has been in ensuring that Departments and agencies disclose information that has previously been withheld for no good reason.

The House will be pleased to know that all Departments have so far complied with the ombudsman's recommendations. One of the benefits that come from the ombudsman system is the fact that it is free to the complainant. That, added to the flexibility of his approach and to the high regard that his office enjoys from Departments and agencies, is a powerful benefit to the citizen.

It may be appropriate for me now to refer to the outstanding qualities of the current holder of the office, Sir William Reid. Sadly, Sir William is due to retire at the end of this year. I am, however, certain that I speak for all Members of the House in expressing appreciation and admiration for the work that he has done since his appointment in 1990. His tenure has witnessed a significant increase in the number of complaints received by his office and a formidable extension to his jurisdiction. Open government is merely one of those extensions. Sir William has established an entirely justifiable reputation for the quality of his investigations. I know that the House will join me in wishing him a long and happy retirement.

There are two unresolved issues arising from the Select Committee's report on the ombudsman. One is the extent of his jurisdiction. Early in this Parliament, in the Committee's report on the powers, work and jurisdiction of the ombudsman, the Select Committee recommended that all Government bodies came within his remit, unless they were explicitly excluded in a schedule to the Act. At present, a body comes within the ombudsman's jurisdiction only if it is explicitly included. The Cabinet Office, the Atomic Energy Authority, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, the Civil Aviation Authority, the National Curriculum Council, the Broadcasting Standards Council and the training and enterprise councils currently remain outside the ombudsman's remit, so he cannot investigate them. That is surely wrong. I believe that the Government should act speedily to bring those bodies within the ombudsman's jurisdiction. Such a move is long overdue.

Secondly, the Committee recommended that the Government grant the ombudsman access to Cabinet and Cabinet Committee papers. At present, he is denied access to such documents under the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967. I believe that a serious anomaly exists in that area. The code includes Cabinet papers in the lists of information whose disclosure might harm the frankness and candour of internal discussion. Judgment, however, is subject to the possibility that any harm might be outweighed by public interest if the information were made available. Therefore, a right to information in the public interest exists, but the ombudsman is denied the access that he needs in order to judge whether the refusal to disclose is justified.

The Committee recommended that the ombudsman have access to such papers, but I assure the House that that does not necessarily mean that the information would have to be disclosed: Ministers would retain the power to prevent the ombudsman from disclosing any information that was considered prejudicial to the safety of the state. I would welcome my right hon. Friend's comments on the matter: an anomaly exists and it must be resolved.

The Select Committee recommended a freedom of information Act, which we believe would open government to more public scrutiny. We do not claim that the existing code is ineffective: clearly, half an information loaf is better than no information. The code is helpful but, in our view, it does not go far enough to satisfy a growing appetite for openness. In evidence from Australia and New Zealand, the Committee heard about the effects of open government from those who have seen at first hand FOI regimes at work for more than a decade. The overwhelming consensus was that open government had been of considerable benefit to public life. It is fair to say that the FOI principle is now an accepted part of the political fabric in those countries.

The Australian Law Reform Commission and the Administrative Review Council recently published a review of the federal Freedom of Information Act. It concluded:

"That the Act has had a marked impact on the way agencies make decisions and the way they record information".

The consensus in Australia and New Zealand was that the right of access to personal files had resulted in far greater objectivity when recording information—I made that point earlier. According to the Australian and New Zealand experience, requests by individuals for personal information constituted the greatest single use of FOI legislation. Therefore, FOI had resulted in a greater release of information. I am pleased to reassure the House that the dire forecasts about the effect of FOI on the candour of advice have not been borne out by events.

I congratulate the Government on introducing both the code and the citizens charter, which represent substantial steps forward in open government. They materially benefit the citizens of the United Kingdom. However, the Select Committee and I ask the Government to go one step further and introduce a freedom of information Act. By doing so, the Government have nothing to fear and much to gain.

Before I sit down, I seek the indulgence of the House. I serve on the Standing Committee that is considering the Education Bill. With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, and by leave of the House, I shall shortly leave the Chamber in order to return to my place on that Committee.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) does not need the Chair's permission, but I much appreciate his courtesy in informing the House.

5.35 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): This is a short but important debate and I congratulate the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on introducing it. He made some important and sensible comments—which is not a common occurrence in the Chamber. I believe that we should demand a freedom of information Act from any Government of any complexion. However, today I shall address the reasons why I believe that the House of Commons needs such an Act more urgently than any individual who desires access to official files.

Sadly, Members of Parliament now have real difficulty in obtaining access to accurate information from Government. I shall explain why that is so. Increasingly, answers to parliamentary questions—irrespective of the code of conduct—if they do not seek to mislead, certainly seek to make it difficult to understand fully the information necessary to examine the workings of government. Such information is so fundamental and vital in a democracy that it cannot be treated as a mere matter of procedure. We are told that there are two kinds of knowledge: either we understand the subject or we know where to obtain information about it.

Ministers and the proceedings of the House of Commons are highest on our list when we require access to information. Therefore, I am sorry to say that in the past 30 years, I have seen a marked deterioration in the desire of Government Departments to hand out information. It has now reached the point where they take—if I dare say it—a two-finger approach to the House of Commons. I have a specific reason for that assertion.

I have read the code carefully and it states plainly that, when information is requested, it should be supplied unless the exemptions that the hon. Gentleman mentioned come into play because of security or other problems. So why must Members of Parliament ask 30 questions before they obtain information—in this case from the Department of Transport—that flights carrying British citizens are operating illegally? That was clear from the answer provided to my first question, yet I was forced to put 30 questions to the relevant Department—which cost the taxpayer a considerable sum—before I obtained a precise statement.

Why do I increasingly receive answers that are so obscure as to be laughable if they were not so embarrassing? I recently obtained answers that said things such as, "It is too soon to know when we shall take that decision." That is fine, but when will we know when that decision will be taken? I recently tabled a series of questions about the channel tunnel fire, the committee meetings and the decision to open the tunnel to various forms of transport. Some of my questions were answered, inasmuch as I was told that I could not have access to the information I sought, but that a summary of the general reports would be available to me in the Library of the House of Commons—presumably if I lived long enough.

I asked the Secretary of State five specific questions on fire-related incidents, all of which in some way affected my constituents. They were answered in the following manner.

"This"—

presumably the information—

"is precluded under the terms of the channel fixed-link concession agreement".

There are reams of it. In effect, the answers say that the Government can supply the information only to the people concerned, because it is confidential and it

"shall not save as required by law"—[*Official Report*, 6 December 1996; Vol. 286, c. *804*.]

be supplied to the House of Commons.

Is not the Minister required by law to give information to Members of Parliament? Do we not have privileges in this Chamber? Do we not have the right to question him, precisely because we are concerned about safety? I think that we do, and people should look closely at what Ministers say.

I have had other startling—I was going to say mind-boggling—answers from Government Departments. I asked the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 31 October at column *238* of the *Official Report*, what was the total number of hours that had been worked by consultants on privatisation. The Minister replied:

"The answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1996; Vol. 286, c. *420*.]

Only two firms were involved and the total expenditure had already been made public.

In another reply, the Minister said that it was not the Government's policy to divulge the hourly fees for their advisers. When I asked further questions, I was told that the employment of individuals was a matter for their employers. In other words, because Government money was being spent by a Government appointee on a Government procedure—it was being given to a private firm—the House of Commons was not to be told how much it was costing and what was the total effect on the taxpayer.

Had I more time, I could continue with example after example, but I finish with one that I find endearing and very entertaining. I asked the Department of Transport a series of questions about Civil Aviation Authority investigations to ensure that international standards are being met. The question was pursuant to an earlier reply and, again, I gave the Department the date and the column number. I received the answer:

"It is not clear to which of the answers of 26 November the hon. Member is referring."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1996; Vol. 286, c. *418*.]

Has the Department of Transport not heard of the telephone? Does it not understand that when there are two questions in a column, both from the same

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

hon. Member—one question on one subject and the second on a subject to which the pursuant question relates—it probably means that she is talking about the subject mentioned in her second question?

The reality is that, whether we like it or not, Departments are going in for obfuscation on a grand scale. They use the creation of stand-off agencies to try to hide information and use as an excuse, "This is commercially confidential," and so on. Even when we know that the information is vital, it is not forthcoming. I know, for example, that the Department of Transport is vacating an office building in Manchester and handing over £800,000 of taxpayers' money to its landlord for the only reason that it wants to reject the lease and move to Manchester. I need to know about that, because it affects the costing of a move that relates to a district traffic office. Yet I am not allowed to have that information in the House of Commons. I have to use my own sources. No one is prepared to make that information public. We are perilously close to trying to hide information. It happens time and again.

The Chamber should be full for this debate, because when the House of Commons cannot get information about Departments, about the effect of European legislation, about the implications of changes through agencies, our constituents suffer. Nobody else suffers. Our constituents suffer individually because of decisions that are taken for no apparent reason, and no one bothers to explain why. They suffer collectively because of decisions taken by the present Government, which are never explained and never laid out in any detail, but simply carried through, as they have been during the past 17 years, with scant regard for the interests of the House of Commons.

Above all, when such behaviour becomes the norm, when not just civil servants but their masters give the impression that the House of Commons is a Chamber to be derided or circumvented, so that it does not need access to accurate and important information, every one of us is in great danger. When Governments are able to do what they like with individual lives, with no regard for individual interests, democracy will cease to work. The House of Commons—probably for the first time since Simon de Montfort called together his baronial friends—is seeking accurate information. Let the Minister answer that if he can.

5.45 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge–Brownhills): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). I echo her congratulations to the Chairman of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), on his conversion to freedom of information.

I am, de minimis, grateful to the Government for introducing a code, as for many years we came to a block on that. I add my fervent congratulations on the work of Sir William Reid, who has been a good toiler in those fields and extended the public's perception of that to which they are entitled. I also commend Mr. Maurice Frankel of the Campaign for Freedom of Information. Some hon. Members will have received a detailed briefing, which was covered by my hon. Friend the Chairman of the Select Committee. I look forward to my right hon. Friend the Minister responding to a number of questions.

Some of us have gone across this course for many years, and the basic question is, "Why freedom of information?" Our system of government is one of democratic and accountable government. If we think about our language, literature, the resonance of freedom and liberty, we use the words of Pope, in his "Essay on Man":

"What can we reason, but from what we know".

Over the years, I have watched the argument ebb and flow, but the central feature of British Government, the Executive and its bureaucracy—Whitehall—is that they must hold upon and unto themselves all the rights about releasing information that affects the public policy of our nation. We cannot be democratic, nor can we hold Governments to account unless we know what they are doing. The right is that of the people. This system of government is constructed to serve the interests of the people.

What are the arguments against providing information to the generality of us as citizens? Is it to protect the interests of the Executive? Executives are formed from this democratic Chamber; they are an extension, in a sense, of that representative function. I emphasise as strongly as I can that there is no democracy. I agree with the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich. There is no true democracy—perhaps I should qualify it in that way—if Government rigorously maintain unto themselves the right to release information as and if they please. That is really what the struggle has been about all through the years. However, that is the prerogative not of Government, although that is what we are held by to this day, but of the people and of the House.

We all, including the Cabinet Minister, have an interest in ensuring that we are informed. I know that, from the high battlements of Government, it is sometimes convenient to be able to withhold information. Over the years, I have reflected that one day—this now seems more imminent—we shall be in opposition, and the information that we shall struggle to obtain will be vital to the development of public policy.

That is the first constitutional principle. It is a right of the people. It is a right because of who we are, because of our spirit and our feeling. It is also the essence of accountable government, and I affirm that public policy decisions are likely to be the better for a full and open debate.

I am concerned. A series of events has touched on the role of the House and its ability to hold Governments to account. Whatever the House feels about the Scott report—it made its judgment on the inquiry—that report revealed a great deal of information about the working of Whitehall. I have never heard the Government dispute the detail in the report. As I understand it, the Government, and therefore the House, decided that Sir Richard Scott's conclusions were inappropriate and wrong. We have the evidence of senior civil servants—the Cabinet Secretary no less—that giving half the picture is an appropriate way of keeping us informed. That has become the culture, and was the title of a play and an important book on the subject. Half the picture is not good enough.

We have had the code, and we have a series of initiatives. Lord Callaghan's Administration had the Croham directive. I was bemused by the fact that when

one asked former Labour Ministers how they implemented the Croham directive and what it meant to their Departments, they would deny all knowledge of it. It was a breath on the wind and it blew away, but it served its purpose to give Government a busyness and an impetus.

I am also mindful of the fact that the curse of commercial confidentiality diminishes our ability to obtain information. It is blown out of all proportion. I shall use the example of the sale of Ministry of Defence housing, which is another controversial matter. I understand that members of the Select Committee on Defence were given information that was not available to other Members of the House, although we are all duly elected on an equal franchise. However, the information was available to Members if they had commercial associations with commercial companies that wished to make a bid. That is wildly inappropriate.

What was commercial confidentiality in that instance? I have still not fathomed it out, although I have had enlightening correspondence from the Prime Minister. The essence of the sale was an auction: we invited competitive tenders. The United States Government conduct auctions, which they consider to be public matters. What is for sale and the conditions attached to it are a matter of public knowledge. How else can people be assured that a sale has been carried out openly and above board, and that the best possible price has been achieved?

I cited those examples because they are of some importance in determining the nature of public policy, although I have not gone into detail, as I intended. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster perhaps knows, I am a parliamentary chairman of the Campaign for Freedom of Information. It is not that I do not wish the Government well—I have seen the changes that Conservative Governments have introduced. That which was impossible yesterday, has become possible today.

I remember the reforms that were made to bring the security services into the open. In the debates of 1988, I listened to Ministers say that the entire state of the United Kingdom was in danger of falling. I heard Back Benchers argue that it was outrageous even for Ministers to know what the security services were doing. Yet, the very Minister who advanced those propositions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), the then Home Secretary, overcame those arguments and found a way forward. However inadequate I may think those measures were, there was a revolution in thinking.

Where is the block on openness? I do not see my political friends, such as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, as enemies of open government. I appreciate the argument about the cautious, judicious process of government, but I see an opening up, so why is there a constant block? When one reads Sir William Reid's reports, one feels that there is a bureaucratic block, and that Whitehall itself fears open government more than anything. I did not understand why that should be so, until I read the Scott report. I then saw that our public policy is often determined by unelected civil servants, even without the remit of their Ministers. That is very serious.

It is perhaps inappropriate to repeat on the Floor of the House what the Deputy Prime Minister said outside the House, but he stated that he would like a freedom of information Act because it would help him to manage his Departments. That is one of the great difficulties. The huge range of British Government is such that it is difficult to know what is happening in all the limbs and outer parts.

I urge my right hon. Friend, and through him the Government, to grasp the opportunity to assert what the House and the country has stood for—our worthwhile tradition of liberty and holding Governments to account. In order to do that, ours is the right to have all the information that we wish, as of right.

5.56 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): The theme that has emerged from the previous two speeches is that the present parliamentary process gives insufficient opportunity for people to make a proper contribution—not least through their elected parliamentary representatives—to policy making, the preparation of legislation and, perhaps most important, the scrutiny of Government policies and actions. I agree with that view. All too often, people are kept in the dark. Parliament fails to provide protection against government from behind closed doors.

The code of practice on access to Government information was a welcome—although regrettably small—step to the opening up of government. In theory, the code limits the grounds for withholding information and provides, for the first time, a mechanism for independent review of refusals to give information by officials and Ministers. It is said that Departments are now committed to releasing the internal guidance that they use in their dealings with the public. Even exempted information may, in theory, be disclosed if there is an overriding public interest in doing so.

We should not allow ourselves to be deluded into thinking that that is sufficient. There are serious problems not only in the way in which the code is working in practice, but in its scope, which is far too narrow to be genuinely effective. The Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration recognised a number of failings and omissions, and made some useful recommendations, many of which the Government have accepted. However, they have notably rejected some of the most important recommendations.

I urge the Government to reconsider. The first problem is that public awareness of the code is still too low. Rights that people do not know they have are of limited value. The Government's recent, small-scale advertising has not raised the code's profile. The Government have decided that it is a matter for individual Departments to promote the code, but I believe that central Government must play a key role.

The code currently promises access to information only, and not to documents. That is another significant drawback that allows selective editing to take place. The public have little reason to have confidence in such a scheme. The Minister acknowledged the problems that that causes. Does he believe that the Government should amend the code so that copies of original documents must be provided when requested?

Much information is exempt from the code. Any rational parliamentarian would accept that there are grounds for some exemptions, but other omissions seem draconian. A blanket ban on information relating to

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immigration, for example, seems only to reinforce the view that there is something to hide. The Government have argued that the exemptions are justified because they cause extra costs or work loads to be imposed on the relevant Department. In a democracy, such an argument is not and never can be a valid excuse for withholding information; such information is one of the costs of democracy.

There is another exemption on disclosure of information held for health and safety purposes, including food safety. Even if the disclosed information were to reveal substantial danger to the public health or safety, the code currently does not help the public obtain such information. After the recent E. coli deaths in Scotland, and the continuing public concern over bovine spongiform encephalopathy and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, its human equivalent, does the Minister not agree that the public have a right to know about possible dangers in the food that they eat?

Many public bodies are exempt completely from the code. It seems ironic that a scheme to encourage open government does not include in its jurisdiction the police, nationalised industries, the Atomic Energy Authority, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, the Civil Aviation Authority, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Broadcasting Standards Council, training and enterprise councils—the list goes on and on. Even when the ombudsman can investigate, the Government have retained the power to reject any recommendations made.

An obvious, natural and right remedy to the situation is to pass a freedom of information Act. That was, rightly, the conclusion of the Select Committee, not least because it would simplify and unify the hotchpotch of rights to information. Such an Act would cover the entire public sector, provide access to documents—not only edited highlights—and provide everyone with an accessible and enforceable right to information.

The Government have chosen, again, to reject that recommendation, and I do not believe that their reasons for doing so stand up to scrutiny now any more than they did in the past. It has been claimed that, as an administrative document, the code is more flexible and can be amended more easily in the light of experience. The code can be amended more easily—but not necessarily to achieve greater openness.

The lack of a proper Bill has allowed serious anomalies in the permitted exemptions, such as those for immigration and food safety. It has also led to disparate charging regimes, and to Government-filtered information rather than to the provision of full documentation. The lack of a statutory basis means that current statutory secrecy clauses cannot be overridden, and that the Government can prevent the ombudsman from conducting an investigation, because his jurisdiction has simply not been re-examined by the House.

The Government claim that the code has entirely avoided long and expensive disputes in appeals. That is untrue, because, in some cases, the appeals procedure has taken many months. The main reason why there have not been delays is that, as I said, most people are not aware of the procedure or how to make use of it. Therefore, the ombudsman has not been overburdened, as was, and should be, expected if people are encouraged and able to make effective use of the system.

Liberal Democrats have long called for a freedom of information Act, to end the Government's often obsessive secrecy. We believe that such an Act would enable people to know much more about the conduct of government, and thereby hold Government to account. The Act should confer a general right of access, except in a small number of narrowly defined areas in which it is overwhelmingly in the public interest to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. I shall not list those matters, but I believe they could be determined fairly easily by general agreement.

Complaints about refusal of access to information or unreasonable delay could then be referred to an independent commissioner, who has powers to carry out investigations and to take action to ensure that information is forthcoming. An independent tribunal could be established to hear appeals against decisions, to which both the information holder and the information seeker would be entitled to appeal.

As the Liberal Democrat spokesman on the environment, I have a special interest in ensuring that environmental information is not withheld from the public. The Government have previously stated their agreement, at least in principle, on that point. The European Union directive on freedom of access to information about the environment has been implemented by the environmental information regulations. However, a major deficiency of the regulations is that they lack a specific enforcement mechanism.

More than three years ago, in July 1993, in their Command Paper, "Open Government", the Government promised to introduce a statutory right of access to health and safety information, modelled on the environmental information regulations. They suggested then that the new right could be enforced by a tribunal, and that any such tribunal could also deal with complaints under the environmental information regulations. Although there have been four Queen's Speeches—at least two of which were regarded as "light" in terms of legislative work load—since the publication of that White Paper, there has been no sign of movement to implement the proposal.

The matter was examined, yet again, during the passage of the Environment Act 1995. I introduced an amendment to the Bill that would have allowed for the creation of a specialist tribunal that could hear disputes on the provision of access to environmental information. In responding and arguing against that amendment, the Under–Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), speaking on behalf of the Government, clearly said that he anticipated that there soon would be such a tribunal, and that the work was "well in hand". Since his insistence, that matters were "well in hand", was more than a year ago, perhaps Ministers will tell us today whether we are any closer to setting up that environmental information tribunal.

Apparently we are no closer, because, this afternoon, I received a written answer from the responsible Minister stating:

> "I have no immediate plans to introduce legislation to establish an environmental information appeals tribunal. The recently published first report of the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities on Freedom of Access to Information on the Environment recommends different procedures, which are being carefully considered."

Perhaps I should remind the Chancellor of the Duchy of his own answer, in January 1996, when he appeared before the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and was questioned about the delay. He replied:

"A commitment was given, a promise was made, we have not delivered it so far and I want those promises honoured."

It appears that the Government are happy to suggest that they will do something and to give assurances that they will do something, but they are far less happy actually to do anything. In the meantime, the public are denied access to a proper enforcement mechanism under the environmental information regulations and to health and safety information.

As the Government have said that the proposed right to health and safety information will not apply retrospectively, information that is currently being gathered will not be accessible even when—or if—the new legislation is enacted; the longer the delay, therefore, the greater the amount of information that will be permanently withheld from the public.

I shall give an example, from the south-west, of why the issue is important to my constituents. Solicitors Toller Beattie have asked for information and correspondence received by the Department of the Environment from South West Water on the delay to four bathing water schemes in the south-west—which are vital for my constituents—and the process under which the list of sensitive areas was reduced, whereas South West Water's list of less sensitive areas was increased. The Department of the Environment made a formal refusal, on the ground that much of the information that they were seeking related to "confidential deliberations" of the group that worked out the proposals for the sensitive and less sensitive areas under the urban waste water treatment directive. Subsequent correspondence, however, showed that the information withheld had not even been considered by that group.

In a democracy, surely the public have a right to know on what basis an area of bathing water has been declared sensitive. In a democracy, surely a water company—which may or may not be polluting that water—should not have the right to withhold such information from the general public, whom it serves. Will the Minister, therefore, give a firm commitment and a fixed timetable for establishing an environmental information tribunal? As the Government have already shown their sympathy for the creation of such a body, and the concept has broad support, surely there is no reason to procrastinate further.

As I said, the code of practice on access to Government information is a welcome step in the right direction, but it has not gone far enough, and it is not broad enough. The Government—or perhaps their civil servants, who advise them—do not appear to trust the public. By denying the House an opportunity to debate a proper freedom of information Bill, they seem not to trust the democratically elected representatives of the public either.

We must begin to increase the level of trust between the Government and the citizens of the United Kingdom. A democracy works best when its citizens are informed and can demand the highest quality of service—service which they are entitled to expect. Without such information, it is not truly a democracy. I believe that we still have a long way to go to achieve that.

6.8 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): There seems to be a perception in the House that many of our problems could be resolved by making more information available and that the country would be better governed as a result. It is ironic that those who advance that case seem to ignore what is happening to us in the European Union. In my submission, the problems identified in the debate stem as much from our membership of the European Union as from our domestic arrangements, as some hon. Members perceive them.

It is unacceptable that the Council of Ministers will meet in secret. We shall not know what was discussed. No minutes or *Hansard* will be available of what is said there. We shall not even know how our Ministers have voted. We have to rely on inspired leaks to the press or perhaps a Minister volunteering the information. We have even less access to European information than we have to information through Parliament.

I accept that, when we put questions to Ministers, as we all do frequently, we are not obliged to elicit the truth. I suspect that a game is played on many occasions, when Departments have a vested interest in not declaring the truth. Nevertheless, the Back Bencher has the opportunity to go back again and again on the same subject to tease out what is going on in the Department or in the Minister's mind. That is vastly better than the situation in Europe—we do not know what goes on the Council of Ministers and we have no means of finding out.

I am inclined to go further and say that, considering the past 25 years and our membership of the European Union, we might not have reached the position in which we find ourselves if the British people had been told the truth from the beginning. Had the British people been told the truth 25 years ago, I believe that they would have voted differently in the 1975 referendum. They were not told the truth because the politicians of the day—they must take the blame for this—recognised that, had the truth been told, the people would not have endorsed what was in prospect.

Back Benchers, who represent their constituents on many issues—particularly agriculture, in my case—are now in the appalling situation of being unable to discern what is going on and what discussions and decisions have taken place on the issues about which we are vitally concerned. We have scarcely any real opportunity to find out what was in the minds of Ministers when they were engaged in discussions with their opposite numbers in Europe. We have no means of knowing what was said or how they voted.

I believe that Sweden has had freedom of information legislation for a long time. After being members of the Community for only a very short time, the Swedes are realising that it is not what they thought they were letting themselves into. They did not realise that joining the European Union would leave them unable to discern what was going on. We are not party to the important decisions that involve us as Members of Parliament and the people whom we represent because there is no open debate in the Council of Ministers.

I know that others wish to speak in the debate, so I shall draw my remarks to a conclusion by saying that, although I recognise that many right hon. and hon. Members feel that there are deficiencies in our system in the Westminster Parliament and I sympathise with their

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views in many respects, a greater threat to democracy overhangs the issue—the threat from a form of government by unelected and unaccountable people whom we have no means of controlling. When the decisions predicated by the European civil servants and the European Commission are brought to the Council of Ministers, they are rubber-stamped without any democratic check or balance by the representatives of the people—ourselves, the Members of Parliament.

6.14 pm

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): I congratulate Sir William Reid on his retirement. I have worked with him since he became the ombudsman. He has been one of the best ombudsmen and has highlighted the office more than anybody else. I have seen him on television news programmes on several occasions, pushing the argument for greater freedom of information. Wherever he goes, I hope that he continues to do that.

The code came into being about two years ago. The Select Committee went to Australia, where we took a lot of evidence and worked very hard. It was not a gravy train, as some people portray those trips; it was a hard slog and we had to take a lot of evidence from Australia and New Zealand. It was interesting to see the contrasts between their freedom of information legislation and the situation here. Since then, their legislation has been updated to make it even better and friendlier. We discovered some aspects that were not quite right.

In this country, we have just had a freedom of information system introduced—we did not have it when we were in Australia. We are the leading lights of democracy and we have not even got freedom of information legislation; we have a code. It is a beginning and has worked to a certain extent, but there are a lot of loopholes and the code leaves a lot to be desired. The Select Committee was right to say that there should have been legislation. The Labour side voted for that and it was decided by one vote. I hope that the Government take that on board. In fact, I am not bothered whether they take it on board now, because the new Government—my party's Government—might do so. We shall hear later what my Government will do when they get power.

There are advantages and drawbacks. We have heard the advantages. I do not want to take too long, because I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright), who used to be a member of the Select Committee, wants to speak, but there is no harm in mentioning the drawbacks again.

Public awareness of the code is limited. It receives little publicity. Many people are not aware that it is there for them. They do not know where to go. In fact, they do not even know how to contact the ombudsman. We have had that problem before with the health service. Health trusts tell everyone how to complain to the trust, but they do not tell anyone how to complain to the ombudsman if they are not satisfied with the result. It is the same with the code. People who are refused information are not told that they can complain about that to the ombudsman.

Of course, complaints take a long time to investigate. I want to speak briefly later about delays by Departments. Access is given to information but not to documents. A person has to be precise when asking for information. Why do we not give people the documents? Why do we narrow it down and say, "You must tell us what you want and we'll give it to you"? Why not just give people all the relevant documents? That is how it should be done. It is done like that in New Zealand and Australia.

As the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) said, the Government are free to ignore the ombudsman's recommendations. I always thought that the ombudsman had the greatest of power. I thought that he had the power of a High Court judge, but the Government can take no notice of his recommendations. That is beyond belief in a democracy. That is why we have an ombudsman.

In some cases, people requesting information from Government Departments are getting four or more reasons why they should not have it. They are told that providing information makes extra work. Of course it does. Democracy is costly and may involve extra work, but that is not a blanket excuse or even a reason for refusing information. I hope that the Minister will address that point in his reply.

The experience of the past two years makes it clear that the code of practice should be reviewed. The general election is approaching and I am sure that the incoming Labour Government will examine the code of practice, amend it and introduce the relevant legislation. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) will confirm that undertaking. The code is not working and we know what we have to do to put it right.

There have been many complaints about Government Departments and it is interesting to find out just how sloppy they are. For example, the Department of Trade and Industry delayed for eight and a half months before failing to supply some information that had been requested. The DTI simply did not want to release it.

The Health and Safety Executive took 13 months to supply information on handling nuclear fuel. I thought that the Health and Safety Executive was a public body, but of course it has been exempted, so information is not available.

The Department of the Environment was asked for information about Touche Ross. After 17 months, the problem still had not been resolved and the information remained unavailable. Somebody was certainly trying to hide something. Obviously, there are some dodgy characters working for Touche Ross.

Many straightforward requests are denied. The Department for Education and Employment took 34 days to deal with one request and provide one page of foolscap.

Mr. Gill: Is the hon. Gentleman entirely persuaded that the new legislation would have prevented those delays? What confidence does he have that an Act of Parliament will end all that prevarication?

Mr. Campbell: An Act of Parliament would cover all those organisations. At present, they are under no legal obligation to supply information. If a complaint is made to the ombudsman, the Minister can ignore it. Legislation would prevent long delays. A statutory right to information would put an end to all the time wasting and people would not have to wait 17 months. The ombudsman would enforce that statutory right.

At present, we have only a code. A code is simply decided, whereas the House considers legislation and can amend it. That is democracy. Legislation would get rid of all the claptrap of people being denied information month after month and year after year.

The Treasury took 41 days to supply information. The Inland Revenue also took 40 days to provide information. All those days were lost in delays in providing simple information. It seems to me that the Government and civil servants are afraid to release information. When the Select Committee went to Australia, we discovered that civil servants there were anxious about releasing information. They were worried that it might upset Ministers. The matter comes down to the fact that Ministers and civil servants are hiding information and destroying democracy.

Finally, I should mention the national health service code which has operated for about a year. It is not working. Once again, the code has not been publicised. Trust after trust is refusing to supply information and most people are unaware that they are entitled to information about their hospital records. Although the code was a good idea, the public have no idea that it exists. I hope that the next Labour Government review the matter and introduce legislation on the freedom of information. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland will confirm that.

6.25 pm

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock and Burntwood): This is a short debate, and I shall be extremely brief as I have only one point to make. I sat on two Select Committees that produced reports on the matter—the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and, more recently, the Select Committee on Public Service. No doubt the Minister will tell us that those Committees had different views.

The Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration spent a prolonged time examining nothing but the issue we are considering today. We travelled to Australia and New Zealand. Never was a trip more justified and never did more people see the light in more enjoyable surroundings. One could see conversions taking place as we travelled around that glorious land and returned to discuss what we had discovered.

The Select Committee produced what will be seen as a landmark report in the history of an issue that has been debated for so long. It represents a devastating critique of existing arrangements and a devastating argument for moving in a different direction.

The Public Service Committee—an admirable Select Committee on which I now sit—was driven by the party divide after Scott and was unable to take the same bipartisan and dispassionate approach. The party hatches came down and we all did what we had to do. The first was an example of a Select Committee at its best; the second was an example of a Select Committee reverting to type.

There is one issue to confront and the House can no longer avoid it. We have to decide whether information—the lubricant of democracy—should be considered to be a grant from Government or a right of citizenship. If the House believes that it should continue to be a grant from Government, it will be happy to continue with codes that the House has never discussed, scrutinised or approved. If, however, it believes that information is a right of citizenship, it will demand legislation to enshrine that right. The House would then be able to scrutinise the issue and examine the advantages and disadvantages of the code. The House would own the legislation.

We are moving away from a system of cosy self-regulation and club government, when majorities decide how much the rest of us should know, towards an era when people claim rights as citizens and expect the House to protect those rights.

We are on the eve of what will probably be seen as the most ambitious period of political reform for more than a century. It seems quite extraordinary that the Government appear not to understand the mood and are entering a general election campaign defending the voting rights of hereditary peers while denying people freedom of information legislation. Never have a Government so misunderstood the democratic current now running through this country. We are on the eve of a great reforming Administration, and I expect my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) to tell us that freedom of information legislation will be a prominent part of our first year in office.

6.29 pm

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): The thrust of this debate has been almost inevitably towards freedom of information legislation. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) for his eloquent plea. His speech was preceded by the equally eloquent plea of my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell). I was also struck by the powerful plea made by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). She issued a warning both to the present Government and to future Governments. She said that, in her experience, despite the White Paper, the code and the strength of Select Committees, Governments are now more reluctant to release information than when she first became a Member.

One of the debate's most moving speeches was made by the hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), for whom I have always had enormous respect. I hope that my saying so does not do him further damage among Conservative Members. He is a passionate advocate not only of freedom of information but of everything that touches civil liberties in the House. Often when I hear him speak, I think to myself, "This is the House of Commons at its best"—a fiercely independent Member making a plea for the rights and powers not only of the House but of individual citizens. I consider it a privilege to take part in the same debate as him.

I very much admired the way in which the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), advanced his arguments. I congratulate the Committee on its excellent report, especially on concluding that freedom of information legislation is the best way of proceeding. I want to convey my most heartfelt thanks to its members for the enormous sacrifices that they have all undergone on our behalf in going to far-flung places to examine important issues. Such sacrifices were worth while, given that the Chairman returned a convert to freedom of information. The House owes a great debt of gratitude to the Committee, which, under the hon. Gentleman's able chairmanship, initiated today's debate. There are all too few debates of this nature. Perhaps, there are all too few debates on Select Committee reports.

I associate myself with the remarks made about Sir William Reid and offer my thanks for his outstanding contribution. He has proved to be a redoubtable battler.

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He courageously accomplished an important task in taking the mandarins as well as members of the Cabinet in such a direction.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said about the need for open government:

"When you start saying, 'Well, we must only reveal the minimum amount of information possible to the public', and the presumption is that the public and Parliament do not have the right to know, you lead towards totalitarianism and political dictatorship, and I think that is fundamentally different from my conception of parliamentary democracy."

He was absolutely right. The White Paper on open government said:

"At the heart of the Government's philosophy is a belief in the need to return to individual citizens the power and means to make their own choices and to determine their own priorities. The Government has insisted that public institutions exist to serve the individual, not the other way about."

That is quite so. It will be Labour's intention to unlock the British people's potential to renew their communities, public services and nations, by trusting them and creating partnerships with them in the way in which the White Paper suggested.

In oral evidence to the Select Committee on 17 January, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said:

"The two major advantages"—

of open government—

"are, first of all that in a parliamentary democracy it is extremely important that all those who take an interest . . . should know the facts behind a particular government decision, the reasoning behind administrative action, so that there can be an informed debate, so that those affected can understand what actually will affect them and why . . . Secondly, it is very important in government there should be a culture, a spirit of openness, for that makes better decision making among civil servants and ministers, because civil servants have to take minor decisions on behalf of ministers in many different circumstances. It is very important that the approach should be the public need to be informed about this particular process or decision, that should be the assumption of civil servants, and I think it makes for better decision making".

The irony is that the Chancellor made that statement when the Scott report was in the course of completion. Scott revealed, however, that a culture of secrecy permeates almost every aspect of the Government's activity. Information was treated as a precious resource, to be given out only when absolutely necessary and, even then, not in full. If guidelines were changed, it was considered that there was no need to tell Parliament. Instead, inaccurate and evasive replies were used as a series of excuses for keeping Parliament and the public in the dark about what was going on.

The Scott report made the case for a freedom of information Act unanswerable, not only because of how it might have been applied in the specific case with which the report dealt, but due to the sea change that it would bring about in attitudes towards the release of information. Ministers have said that a freedom of information Act would not have helped in the arms-to-Iraq affair; that the information would have been covered by the exemptions that any sensible freedom of information Bill would have to include.

Much of what was being asked did not relate to national security or even commercial confidentiality, as my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich so ably exposed. Information was withheld, because that is the culture in which the Government operate, and Ministers wanted to avoid embarrassment and accountability. Despite his fine words about open government, the Chancellor of the Duchy was put up in the Scott debate to defend the indefensible in one of the most ruthless and cynical exercises of self-preservation undertaken by any Government in modern political times.

The Scott report underlined the case for a freedom of information Act. Scott stated:

"Without the provision of full information it is not possible for Parliament, or for that matter the public, to hold the executive fully to account . . . If Ministers are to be excused blame and personal criticism on the basis of the absence of personal knowledge or involvement, the corollary ought to be an acceptance of the obligation to be forthcoming with information about the incident in question."

We heard a clear statement from the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. Both his party and mine have long been favour of introducing a freedom of information Act to stop unnecessary secretiveness in government. The control of information is one of the greatest powers available to the Government and that power will grow as the information society develops. A Government's attitude to sharing information with the people says much about how they view power and the relationship between themselves and the people who elect them.

The Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, in the report under discussion today, recommended in paragraph 126 that the Government should introduce a freedom of information Act. It asserts that a statute would bring about a far greater change in the culture of Government than merely publicising rights. The report states:

"A more powerful reason (than publicity for rights) given for statute by those we met when we visited Australia and New Zealand was the need to change governmental culture from one of secrecy to one where openness is accepted and there is a willingness to allow the public to participate in the process of government . . . The Committee noted that New Zealand had a directive in place prior to the Act but this was, however, later deemed to be ineffective."

It concludes:

"We are convinced that on balance the advantage lies in favour of legislation. We recommend that the Government introduce a Freedom of Information Act."

That is a seminal and landmark report that will be extraordinarily influential.

Four out of five voters now support freedom of information legislation, yet the Government reject that, instead placing their faith in the operation of the code of practice. The Government believe that

"the Code should now have an enhanced role underpinning the answering of Parliamentary Questions and in other matters of accountability. Given this increase in the importance for the provisions of the Code, the Government does not believe it would be sensible to seek a fundamental change in the status of the Code."

I shall not go into further detail, because we have had an important debate in which Back Benchers have participated. I shall bring my remarks to a close by complimenting the Government on the strides in greater openness that they have made. All the great campaigners—I count colleagues in the Chamber among them—know how difficult it has been to persuade Governments of all complexions to go in the direction of freedom of information. Indeed, it is easier for Oppositions than for Governments to be persuaded.

We believe that the code does not go far enough, and I can give my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood the promise that he sought: we will take an early opportunity to legislate for a freedom of information Act. Bills are available and much of the work has been done by others who have preceded us. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) was one of those and we have his Bill. The Cabinet Office has also done much of the work. Its staff have also been to New Zealand and Australia to see how things are done there. All the work has been done and it could be that, in 12 months' time, if the electorate do the sensible thing, freedom of information legislation will be on the statute book. I look forward very much to that. Such legislation will not be a panacea—no Act of Parliament ever is—but it will be a step change in altering the culture in Whitehall. I even predict that some of my hon. Friends—right hon. Friends if they are in the Cabinet—may not be as enthusiastic about such legislation as some of us are. Nevertheless, we will deal with those problems if and when they arise. I am delighted to have taken part in the debate and I look forward to the Chancellor's remarks.

6.44 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Roger Freeman): I found myself in agreement with the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) when she said that this was an important debate and that she regretted the relatively sparse attendance. The hon. Lady was right, because this is probably one of the most fundamental issues that the House, as a legislature, has to face and it is important that it is properly debated.

We know that the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration is attending a Standing Committee, but I congratulate him and the Select Committee on producing an excellent and well-reasoned report. I do not agree with all the reasons and in the time available to me I shall seek to give a summary of the arguments against them, but I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on the even-handed and rational way in which he presented his case.

The remarks by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), which were echoed at shorter length by the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright), touched on the key issues in this debate. My hon. Friend has been a legislator for almost 18 years and I have been a member of the Executive for 11 years. Both of us represent with our experience the different sides of the argument. The argument for the legislator is the essential, unarguable case for proper, prompt and comprehensive information to be given to the House by the Government. As a member of the Executive, I argue that citizens, and indeed right hon. and hon. Members, possess another right—the right to good government. Both of us bring to the House, I hope, the same genuine desires for proper and open government.

The process is a dynamic one. No one should have a closed mind about what is good, open government. We have seen, in the past 10, 20 and 30 years, significant changes, partly brought about by consistent pressure from my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills, and the process is evolving. It is also important to consider what is in the best interests of the citizen in terms of good and orderly government. I shall develop that theme in a moment.

I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) for quoting what I said to the Select Committee. I believe seriously that rational debate relies on full information and that rational debate on that basis leads to rational decision making and not the normal rant that we sometimes get, not only in the House, but unfortunately in Committee.

On the Scott report, I may say that I do not regard the episode over arms to Iraq as typical of the issues that the Government face. In the daily press of events on Government and the experience of Government Departments, it was atypical, although extremely important. I intend, once we have dealt with the remaining issue on public interest immunity certificates, to place a summary in the Library of the House of all the actions that we have taken, which I promised at the Dispatch Box to do during the Scott debate. I hope to be able to do that as soon as the House returns from the recess.

At the centre of our policy towards openness is the code on access to information, not a freedom of information Act. I am pleased that the Select Committee welcomed what we had achieved with the code on access and I shall publish, as soon as the House returns, a new, revised code on access to information and I shall place a copy in the Library. I shall also write to the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland. The new code will take into account the various recommendations for improvement that we have received, in particular, from the Select Committee on Public Service. I hope that it will be an improvement and I am sure that it will be because it deals with what I call the harm test. The addition to the code also, if I might quote from the final draft which I have circulated to the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration earlier today, states:

"The approach to release of information should in all cases be based on the assumption that information should be released".

It is, therefore, presumptive. Later on, it states:

"In those categories which refer to harm or prejudice"—

the harm test, which should be used when deciding whether information should not be disclosed—

"the presumption remains that information should be disclosed unless the harm likely to arise from disclosure would outweigh the public interest in making the information available."

There are many other amendments and we have tried to ensure that they are in keeping with the report.

What are the arguments against a freedom of information Act? I hear what the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland says about the Opposition's early commitment to a Bill—perhaps not in the first Session of any future Labour Government, but it will receive early consideration. It is not without cost. The right hon. Gentleman will have seen my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary's costing of the Opposition's programme. He will have noticed that, because I am so scrupulous, there is no entry under "freedom of information Act". It is difficult to cost, but there will be a positive cost, as I am sure the right hon. Gentleman recognises.

It is important to recognise that such an Act would probably result in no additional disclosure. In every freedom of information Act throughout the world the usual exceptions apply to dealing with intelligence, Cabinet discussions, civil service policy advice, bank rate policy and so on. We must not fool ourselves into thinking that such an Act would mean a raft of additional information.

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

Although the crucial argument advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth was that such an Act would change the culture and discipline of the civil service and, indeed, Ministers in disclosing information, I believe that it would damage the candour and even the openness of civil servants.

Mrs. Dunwoody: No.

Mr. Freeman: I will tell the hon. Lady why I think that would happen.

Mrs. Dunwoody *rose—*

Mr. Freeman: If the hon. Lady will allow me to finish my argument, I shall be glad to give way.

If we followed the suggestion by the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) and made it a statutory obligation to disclose documents, fear of disclosure would mean that civil service advice would not be written down as comprehensively as it is now and civil servants would not be as free and open in describing the various options.

Mrs. Dunwoody *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Freeman: I accept that the hon. Lady has experience of government. However, Labour Members have not had direct experience of government for 17 years. There is a distinction between facts, reasons and background information that should be disclosed fully and promptly and the sort of policy advice where the civil servant says, "Minister, you've got three options—A, B and C. Don't take A, B is too costly and the Treasury won't wear it, so you're stuck with C."

If, under a freedom of information Act with the sort of provisions wanted by the hon. Member for Blyth Valley, there are statutory sanctions to ensure that such a document is available, first, the advice will not be written down, and secondly, it will not be given.

Mrs. Dunwoody: The self-confidence to argue a case openly is something that the civil service will rapidly learn. In the five years of my trade brief, I found that civil servants were perfectly capable of putting their arguments not only with great force but, at that time, with great coherence.

I shall give one example of the sort of problems I now encounter. Information that I required that would safeguard British travellers was not vouchsafed from the Department of Transport—I got it from the Federal Aviation Authority of America. That country has a freedom of information Act and I took the necessary information off the Internet, in the House of Commons, courtesy of the American system.

Mr. Freeman: I agree with a comment the hon. Lady made earlier. She asked, have not the civil service and the Government heard of the telephone? In my experience, where there is ambiguity or doubt in the mind of the civil servant, call the hon. Member concerned. I intend to take steps to ensure that that advice is more widely promulgated. Too often, we exchange information between the Executive and the legislature via parliamentary questions or correspondence—yet we could find out the reason behind a question, if there is any ambiguity, and provide prompt and fuller information.

I want to place on record what the Government have done to change the culture. It is a slow process, but change is forthcoming. We now publish information memorandums on privatisation opportunities for the private sector. Previously, the civil service would say, "You cannot publish it because it is commercially confidential and there is no justification for it being placed in the Library of the House of Commons." I am pleased to say that we changed that during the past two years.

Today, we published "Public Bodies 1996", which gives information on the remuneration of chief executives of public bodies. There is guidance on answering parliamentary questions, as the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland knows, because he has questioned me about it in the past. We now require that openness guidance to be included in each parliamentary question folder before the civil servant completes advice on answering a question.

I assure the House that when we produce the next monitoring report on the work of the ombudsman and the code of access to information, we will include experience in each of the public Departments. As I said in the Government's response to the Select Committee:

> "Departments will therefore in future be specifically asked to record examples of Code requests as part of the annual OPS monitoring exercise for inclusion in future annual monitoring reports, identifying (wherever possible) where they have resulted in a change of policy towards disclosure."

That is a significant change and I hope that it will be helpful.

I join in the tributes to Sir William Reid. Not only is he a distinguished public servant at a time of great change for the ombudsman, but he has been extremely kind to many hon. Members and ensured that their constituency problems have been dealt with. I am grateful to him for dealing with the concerns of my constituents that I have passed to him.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) raised a number of interesting points. I repeat the Government's commitment to introduce a Bill on access to personal records and information held on health and safety matters. I regret that we have not yet had the opportunity to do so. If I continue to hold my present responsibility, I will do all that I can to persuade my colleagues collectively to include such a Bill in the Queen's Speech.

The hon. Members for Blyth Valley and for Truro raised the issue of publicity. So far, there has been a national campaign. It might make sense now to have a regional one, to ensure that more members of the public are aware of their right of access to the ombudsman and, indeed, their right of access under the code of access.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: I referred earlier to the answer that I received today on the environmental information tribunal, which we had understood would be the most likely forum in which access to environmental information would be enforced. The Minister said that he wanted legislation on health and safety. Will he clarify the position on the enforcement of access to information on both health and safety and the environment?

Mr. Freeman: The Government are considering the proposals in the report of the House of Lords Select

Committee on the European Communities on freedom of access to information on the environment, which recommends alternative procedures for resolving disputes under the regulations as soon as the Government have decided the best way to proceed. I must say that I was unaware of that point, but the hon. Gentleman has now ensured that I will take a personal interest in the matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) raised important points, including access to information on European regulations. I hope to be publishing, in early January, a guidance to all Departments on how to win friends and influence people in Brussels. We do not actually call the check list that—we refer to how Ministers should become involved at an earlier stage in the origination and preparation of directives and regulations. It is important that we take a close interest at a much earlier stage. That goes not just for Parliament and the Executive, but for business and industry.

My hon. Friend also mentioned transparency. I discussed that issue with Swedish Ministers during my recent visit to Stockholm. They were right to say that the whole process of directives and regulations from Brussels should be much more transparent. One way in which to achieve that is to engage in more consultation.

I join the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood in congratulating the Select Committee. I must say that the hon. Gentleman's speech sounded very much like that of a Member of Parliament who was exiling himself permanently to the Back Benches as a voice of the people. Conservative Members will do all that we can to ensure that his ambitions are fulfilled.

Question deferred, pursuant to paragraph (3) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates).

Orders of the Day

Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 11

FEES FOR PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Lords amendment: No. 1, in page 6, line 32, leave out subsections (1) and (2) and insert—

(".—(1) The appropriate Ministers may by regulations make provision about fees for relevant planning applications.

(2) Regulations under subsection (1) above may, in particular—

(a) make provision for the payment to the authority to which a relevant planning application is made of a fee of a prescribed amount,

(b) make provision for the remission or refunding of a prescribed fee (in whole or part) in prescribed circumstances,

(c) make provision for a prescribed fee to be treated as paid in prescribed circumstances,

(d) make provision about the time for payment of a prescribed fee,

(e) make provision about the consequences of non-payment of a prescribed fee, including provision for the termination of the application concerned or any appeal against its refusal, and

(f) make provision for the resolution of disputes.

(2A) Regulations under subsection (1) above may—

(a) make such supplementary, incidental or consequential provision as the appropriate Ministers think fit, and

(b) make different provision for different cases.")

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. Watts.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 2, 82 to 84 and 86 to 88.

7 pm

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): May I seek your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I trust that the Minister was moving the motion relating to the first group of amendments.

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful for that reassuring nod; I feared that we were going to have to discuss the whole lot en bloc—in which event, my speech might have been slightly longer than I had anticipated.

Although we are dealing with a set of amendments relating to planning fees and appeals, I feel that I should first pay tribute to the work that has been done in the other place, particularly by the Select Committee. The detailed scrutiny undertaken there has made our work much easier, as have the clear and concise arguments that have been advanced and answered throughout the Bill's passage so far. As that will enable us to engage in a simpler debate tonight, neither my hon. Friends nor I intend to delay the House unduly.

[Mr. Bradley]

As we are dealing with the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill, perhaps I could ask the Minister whether he intends to make any further statement about today's reopening of the tunnel to passengers. Can he give any further information about safety procedures that may have been changed or enhanced as a result of the consideration and discussions that have followed the fire in the tunnel, about the implications of those discussions for the transport of lorries, and about the inquiry that is currently under way?

I am sure the Minister agrees that it is essential for us to put the maximum possible information about any changes in safety conditions or mechanisms into the public domain, in order to restore public confidence in the channel tunnel at the earliest opportunity. Any statement that the Minister is prepared to make would be welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

May I also ask the Minister a specific question about the amendments? Have any of the proposed procedural changes any public expenditure implications, and, if so, does the Bill cater for them?

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Like the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), I want to link my remarks to the amendments; and, like him, I wish to ask the Minister a question that bears directly on the provisions and proceedings involved in the Bill—and, I believe, on the amendments.

My hon. Friend the Minister will recall that a significant part of the outstanding business from our proceedings that was carried over to the House of Lords was the issue of the Government's response to the parliamentary ombudsman's report, which found the Government responsible for maladministration in relation to the previous planning procedures and the planning blight occasioned by the legislation.

As my hon. Friend will know, the predecessor of the present Secretary of State for Transport endeavoured to sustain the line that maladministration had not taken place, but that line proved unsustainable. It was reversed by my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State, who gave an undertaking to the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration—which is responsible for the ombudsman's work—that the Government would respond positively to the ombudsman's finding of maladministration.

It is now more than a year since my right hon. Friend made that undertaking to the Select Committee—and, indeed, to Members of Parliament such as myself whose constituents are directly affected. I consider it deeply regrettable that the Government have not responded so far; I do not understand why it has taken them so long. I hope that, when he replies to the hon. Member for Withington, my hon. Friend the Minister will also deal with that extremely important issue, which concerns my constituents and others living along the line of the route.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I, too, commend the work of our colleagues in the other place in scrutinising the Bill. As has been rightly said, it has made our job much easier.

May I link my concerns about the reopening of the tunnel with the amendments, and briefly ask the Minister whether he can provide any further information, particularly in the light of doubts expressed about whether the safety procedures worked on the day of the fire, and the latest suggestion that arson may have been involved?

My most pressing concern is public reassurance. As the safety procedures are covered by a confidentiality agreement, no one seems to know exactly what has happened to the fire safety tests. Can the Minister tell us whether previous safety recommendations, designed and presented at an early stage of the tunnel's design, can be published in due course, so that we can establish which procedures were used and which were discarded, and the reasons for that?

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next speaker, let me say that, although I have been tolerant so far, I do not intend to continue to be tolerant. We are discussing a group of amendments, and we must stick to the subject of those amendments.

Mr. Rowe: Unfortunately, the combination of a severe attack of 'flu and my growing belief that the version of the Bill that is on the Table is not the one to which the amendments relate is causing me some difficulty. I am not sure when I should make the point that I wish to make. I hope that you will not be too severe, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Watts: I am happy to join in the tributes paid by the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) and others to the work done in another place.

I hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that your indulgence will last long enough for me to say a few brief words about the reopening of the tunnel. Eurotunnel put proposals to the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority for the resumption of freight and passenger shuttle services. The authority considered its applications, together with the further work done on demonstration of safety procedures, and was satisfied that the resumption of services could be authorised. As I understand it, Eurotunnel has as yet made no proposal to resume heavy goods vehicle shuttle services, so no decision has had to be made on that aspect.

As right hon. and hon. Members will know, three inquiries are under way. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear that he wanted the conclusions of the inquiry by the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority to be published. He also urged that the findings of the two inquiries by Eurotunnel should be published, but I do not believe that we have the power to require that. Similarly, he has been in touch with his French opposite number to urge that the outcome of the official French inquiries should be published. The House will understand that he can go no further than strongly urging our French colleague that that should be done.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) referred to our undertaking to respond to the report of the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration by considering the feasibility of developing a scheme to provide some compensation for those who had suffered severe hardship, in the terms in which the Commissioner reported to the Committee, and which the Select Committee endorsed. Progress has been made in that

examination, and I hope shortly to be able to respond to the Select Committee. I think that my right hon. Friend will acknowledge that that is the proper way for us to make public our conclusions.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) also referred to the reopening of the tunnel. I hope that I have covered the matters about which he was concerned.

Mr. Bradley: I asked specifically whether the planning applications had any public expenditure implications. Will the Minister respond on that point?

Mr. Watts: I apologise. The effect of the amendments is to increase the flexibility of the fee regulations, and in particular to extend the time that a local authority has to determine a request for approval in the unlikely event that the payment of a fee that had been thought to have been made had in fact not been made—for example, if a cheque was dishonoured for some odd reason. There are no new public expenditure implications arising from the amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 2 and 3 agreed to.

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 4, after clause 12, to insert the following new clause—*Heritage: rights of entry*—

(". Schedule (*Heritage: rights of entry*) to this Act (which makes provision about rights of entry for the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England and the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England) shall have effect.")

Mr. Watts: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 89 to 95.

Mr. Watts: The amendments bring into the Bill the rights for the appropriate heritage bodies to enter scheduled monuments, listed buildings and buildings in conservation areas affected by the channel tunnel rail link. Most of those rights had previously been covered in the draft heritage deeds for listed buildings and buildings in conservation areas, and for ancient monuments. Those agreements, which were negotiated to accompany the Bill's heritage provisions, are now incorporated in the Bill.

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful to the Minister for his explanation of the position on heritage matters. Throughout the passage of the Bill, a great deal of concern has been expressed about such matters, especially in respect of grade I listed buildings at St. Pancras—particularly the train sheds.

I am pleased to note that, as Lord Goschen said in another place, a deal has been struck on the possible relocation of the listed gasholder and water point, which had appeared to be an intractable problem. However, concern has been centred on the apparent disapplication of conventional conservation legislation and the normal safeguards of listed buildings, and their replacement with the planning and heritage minimum requirements, which, as the House knows, are enforceable only by civil action for breach of contract in the High Court. As the Minister pointed out, the heritage agreement, or deed, for Camden will be in place.

7.15 pm

Again, I pay tribute to the detailed work carried out in the other place by the Select Committee dealing with heritage matters. Throughout the passage of the Bill, both here and in the other place, detailed consideration has been given to the various problems. However, it was not until Third Reading in the other place that a possible mechanism was suggested that would allow the Secretary of State to determine any dispute between London and Continental Railways, English Heritage and the London borough of Camden. There was continual concern that there was no mechanism for full arbitration of the procedures, and that there was a rather complicated set of schedules, contracts, procedures, undertakings and agreements.

On Third Reading in the other place, Lord Goschen said:

"at a very recent meeting LCR and English Heritage agreed that they should join together in defining a letter of intent from LCR. This would set out how the stages of consultation provided for in the heritage deed would operate and serve and therefore to identify any potential problems in time for them to be satisfactorily dealt with . . . I offered an additional provision in the heritage deed that introduces a process to determine an important area of potential disputes. This will allow English Heritage or the local planning authority to seek determination by the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport where English Heritage or the authority believes its agreement should be sought on a work but LCR proposes consultation. The Secretaries of State would thus be responsible for interpreting what the deed requires."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 21 November 1996; Vol. 575, c. 1385-86.]

Those provisions now form part of the Bill, and are important safeguards. Is the Minister satisfied that the new arrangements will ensure the protection of heritage matters—if I may use that shorthand for the various matters that will be under consideration? Is he certain that any dispute can be quickly resolved, and that the mechanisms agreed through what appear to be tortuous consultations will provide the safeguards that we all want? The essence of the legislation is to move on to speedy implementation, and we do not want any further delays in the development of what is an extremely important project.

Mr. Chidgey: Amendment No. 95 deals with rights of entry to heritage sites and scheduled monuments, especially in Greater London. There is concern about the effects on St. Pancras station of the channel tunnel rail link works. St. Pancras train shed is recognised worldwide as a masterpiece of Victorian engineering, and is an important grade 1 listed building. To accommodate the required new services, new tracks and station facilities will be needed on a massive scale. Some parts of the station will have to be demolished or extensively altered. The new trains will be a quarter of a mile long, which will require the length of the train shed to be doubled.

Of most concern is the fact that, because the Bill operates under the private finance initiative, which is not a problem in itself, the usual requirements and restrictions do not apply. No plans have to be produced by London and Continental Railways. No detailed designs are required until after the contract has been signed. That situation is unique. I do not think that Parliament has ever

[Mr. Chidgey]

previously provided such extensive powers to a contractor for major works to a grade 1 listed building without first having examined plans.

The key question is what controls on London and Continental Railways will exist when it has produced its plans. As has been mentioned, the Bill allows the disapplication of statutory controls in respect of the demolition and alteration of any part of the station. Those controls are replaced by a Department of Transport package to simplify and streamline arrangements.

The package includes design guidelines under the planning and heritage minimum requirements agreement and draft agreements for English Heritage and Camden council, the planning authority. However—and this is the key point—by setting aside the normal listed building consent procedures and replacing them with heritage agreements, the Government inevitably drastically circumscribe the ability of the planning authority and English Heritage to influence plans as they emerge.

The direct consequence is that the Government are depriving themselves of the right of ultimate determination in the event of an unacceptable scheme being proposed. In most matters, it seems that the Secretary of State will have no right to intervene, as he does in normal listed building cases.

I welcome the additional conservation safeguard of the planning and heritage minimum requirements, a wording that attempts to resolve the problem. However, in some quarters they are regarded disparagingly. Some regard them as worse than useless, because they are separate from the heritage agreement and part of a contract between the Department of Transport and London and Continental Railways. I am concerned that it could be enforced by the Department of Transport only if it took High Court action. That is hardly the best way to protect St. Pancras.

I welcome the fact that, at the eleventh hour, the Government have made some concessions, and that London and Continental Railways has agreed to define stages of construction in a letter of intent, so that English Heritage will be able to identify outstanding problems at any stage. I welcome the limited arbitration procedures, by which disagreements about what aspects of development come under which clauses of the agreement can be resolved.

I do not intend to jeopardise this important project by not accepting the case for setting aside normal listed building procedures. Nevertheless, there is a danger that we are introducing a fundamental flaw in setting aside listed building procedures and replacing them with an agreement that allows for almost no democratic scrutiny of developers' proposals, whether by local planning authorities, English Heritage or, as a crucial last resort, the Secretary of State.

We should recognise that this case has pushed the limits of disapplication further than has any other railways Bill. That situation is far from ideal, and we should not allow it to recur. I ask the Minister to assure us that this case will be considered as unique to the channel tunnel rail link, and will not come to be regarded as a precedent for other projects.

Mr. Rowe: The amendment goes to the heart of a great many people's anxieties about the whole business. London and Continental Railways is keen to present itself as extraordinarily careful of the heritage involved and anxious to co-operate in every possible way. Considerable financial doubts hang over the financial viability of the railway. The readiness with which the Government, who originally said that they would not put any money into the scheme, have been pouring in money to make it viable, suggests that they share those anxieties. The problem with St. Pancras train shed, or anywhere else of heritage importance on the line, is that if the promoters run out of money during construction, it will be extraordinarily difficult to hold them to their undertakings. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will address that point.

Mr. Watts: The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) rightly referred to tortuous negotiations, but they have proved worth while. He was right to pay tribute to the work in another place. If we had not arrived at the right balance at the end of those tortuous negotiations, I should have faced many amendments this evening. I can therefore be confident that we have appropriate arrangements in place.

To the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), I point out that amendments Nos. 4 and 95 give English Heritage greater powers of entry than it has under the National Heritage Act 1983. That is right and proper. He was concerned about whether a precedent was being established for setting aside the normal heritage arrangements. It is normal practice, with private and hybrid Bills that authorise major pieces of infrastructure, for the standard provisions retaining listed building consent to be totally disapplied. That used to be a blanket disapplication, but since a Government announcement in 1991, several Bills, such as those dealing with the Jubilee line extension and the docklands light railway Lewisham extension, have included special provisions for heritage. That more recent practice has been followed for this Bill, but we have gone further by creating a comprehensive replacement regime, negotiated with English Heritage and the interested local authorities. The general provisions of the heritage deed cover approval and consultation arrangements and, in addition, for St. Pancras, a set of planning and heritage minimum requirements. That is a contractual requirement on London and Continental Railways. In doing that, I believe that we have struck a proper balance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) suggested that financial difficulties might prevent the full arrangements being put into place. I hope that I can reassure him and the hon. Member for Eastleigh by reminding them that so far, we have not poured any money into London and Continental Railways. It is required to have incurred, I think, two thirds of the total cost of the project before a single penny of taxpayers' money can go to the company. That control of the purse strings reinforces the control that we have through contract law, to ensure that those important provisions are honoured in their implementation. I hope that I have reassured the House that the important heritage at the heart of the terminal is adequately protected by the arrangements that we have put in place.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Clause 18

RAILWAY ADMINISTRATION ORDERS

Lords amendment: No. 5, in page 10, line 8, at end insert—

("( ) An agreement by the Secretary of State shall be effective notwithstanding that, in the case of a rail link service operator, it fetters the Secretary of State in relation to a discretion under sections 60 to 65 of, and Schedules 6 and 7 to, the 1993 Act (the railway administration order provisions of the Act).")

Mr. Watts: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 16 and 22.

Mr. Bradley: The amendments relate to development agreements and undertakings with respect to financial assistance. I merely want to ask the Minister again whether they have any implications for public expenditure.

Mr. Watts: No new expenditure implications are embodied in the amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 6, in page 10, line 9, leave out ("made by statutory instrument")

Mr. Watts: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 7, 9, 14, 15 and 17.

7.30 pm

Mr. Bradley: The amendments relate to delegated powers, and they were tabled in response to the Delegated Powers Scrutiny Committee's report on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill. The Committee identified problems with clauses 18, 22 to 24 and clause 32(4) and (5).

The Bill originally provided for the various orders under those clauses to be made without being laid, and thus subject to no further parliamentary scrutiny. The Opposition welcome the fact that the Delegated Powers Scrutiny Committee felt that there should be further parliamentary scrutiny and suggested that the orders should be made subject to the negative resolution procedure. We always welcome further opportunity to scrutinise detailed legislation. My mind goes back to my previous position as shadow spokesman on social security. Statutory instruments relating to primary legislation on social security were often at least 10 times longer than the original Bill. I do not plead for extra work, but it is important for the integrity of the House that it has the opportunity, even if on a negative resolution, to scrutinise those important matters.

I recognise that the Government did not accept that such scrutiny should apply to clause 32(4) and (5). I understand the Government's arguments. I welcome the recommendations that have been made and I support the amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 7 to 17 agreed to [one with Special Entry].

New clause

Lords amendment: No. 18, after clause 32, to insert the following new clause—*Transfer of functions relating to works*—

(".—(1) If the Secretary of State acquires any land for the purposes of this Part of this Act from a railway operator and there are situated on the land works authorised by statute, he may by order provide for the transfer of any statutory power or duty relating to the works previously exercisable by the railway operator—

(a) to him, or

(b) to a person specified under section 32 above.

(2) The Secretary of State may by order provide for the further transfer—

(a) to him, or

(b) to a person specified under section 32 above,

of a power or duty transferred under subsection (1) above or this subsection.

(3) If a railway operator acquires from the Secretary of State any land on which there are situated works authorised by this Part of this Act, the Secretary of State may, with the consent of the railway operator, by order provide for the transfer to the railway operator of any duty under this Part of this Act relating to the works.

(4) An order under this section may contain such supplementary, incidental, consequential or transitional provision as the Secretary of State considers necessary or expedient in connection with the order.

(5) In subsections (1) and (3) above, references to a railway operator are to a person who has the management for the time being of any network, station or light maintenance depot.

(6) In this section, "light maintenance depot", "network" and "station" have the same meanings as in Part I of the Railways Act 1993.")

Mr. Watts: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Sir John Stanley: This appears to be a substantive amendment. Will my hon. Friend the Minister give a brief explanation of its effect?

Mr. Watts: The new clause is inserted in the Bill following discussions with Railtrack during last year. It is intended to deal with the situation in which the Secretary of State acquires from a railway operator such as Railtrack land on which there are works that have been authorised by statute and, where it is appropriate, transfers to the Secretary of State the statutory powers and duties. It also covers the situation in which the Secretary of State disposes of land on which there are works that have been authorised by the Bill. Subject to the operator's agreement, the Secretary of State may provide for the transfer to that operator of any duty under part I of the Bill in relation to those works.

Sir John Stanley: Will my hon. Friend clarify whether London and Continental Railways is a railway operator for the purposes of the new clause?

Mr. Watts: Yes, it is.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 19 to 96 agreed to.

Schedule 9

DISAPPLICATION AND MODIFICATION OF MISCELLANEOUS CONTROLS

Lords amendment: No. 97, in page 177, line 48, leave out from beginning to end of line 3 on page 178 and insert—

("9.—(1) This paragraph applies where an application for the issue of a permit under the London Lorry Ban Order is made under paragraph 9A below or is otherwise expressed to be made in connection with the carrying out of authorised works.

(2) The application shall be granted if the issue of a permit is reasonably required—

(a) for the purpose of enabling authorised works to be carried out in a timely and efficient manner, or

(b) for the purpose of enabling authorised works to be carried out in accordance with approved arrangements.

(3) If the application is granted, no condition may be imposed which is likely to obstruct the carrying out of authorised works—

(a) in a timely and efficient manner, or

(b) in accordance with approved arrangements.

(4) If the applicant is aggrieved by a decision under sub–paragraph (2) or (3) above, he may appeal to the Secretary of State by giving notice in writing of the appeal to him and the authority whose decision is appealed against within 28 days of notification of the decision.

(5) On an appeal under sub–paragraph (4) above, the Secretary of State may allow or dismiss the appeal or vary the decision of the authority whose decision is appealed against.

(6) If on an appeal under sub–paragraph (4) above against a decision under sub–paragraph (3) above the Secretary of State varies the decision, the variation shall have effect from and including the date on which the appeal was constituted or such later date as the Secretary of State may specify.

(7) The applicant may not challenge a decision under sub–paragraph (3) above otherwise than by an appeal under sub–paragraph (4) above.

(8) In this paragraph—

"approved arrangements" means arrangements approved for the purposes of any of the following provisions of Schedule 6 to this Act—

(a) paragraph 7, so far as relating to item 1 or 6 in the table in that paragraph,

(b) paragraph 16, so far as relating to item 5 in the table in that paragraph,

(c) paragraph 23, so far as relating to item 5 in the table in that paragraph, and

(d) paragraph 25;

"authorised works" means works authorised by this Part of this Act; and

"the London Lorry Ban Order" means the Greater London (Restriction of Goods Vehicles) Traffic Order 1985.

London lorries: emergency permits

9A.—(1) This paragraph applies where a person proposes to undertake a journey before the end of the next complete eight working days, being a journey—

(a) proposed to be undertaken in connection with the carrying out of authorised works, and

(b) for which a permit under the London Lorry Ban Order will be required.

(2) The person may apply for a permit under the Order for the journey by giving the details mentioned in sub–paragraph (3) below to the authority concerned by telephone or by means of facsimile transmission.

(3) The details referred to above are—

(a) the identity of the applicant,

(b) a number on which he can be contacted by telephone or by means of facsimile transmission,

(c) the registration number of the vehicle to which the application relates,

(d) the authorised works in connection with which the journey is to be undertaken,

(e) whether any approved arrangements are relevant to the application, and, if so, what they are,

(f) the date when the journey is proposed to be undertaken,

(g) if it is proposed to stop anywhere in Greater London for the purpose of making a delivery or collection, the place or places at which, and the time or times when, it is proposed to stop for that purpose.

(4) In this paragraph—

"approved arrangements", "authorised works" and "the London Lorry Ban Order" have the same meanings as in paragraph 9 above; and

"working day" means any day which is not a Saturday or Sunday, Christmas Day, Good Friday or a bank holiday in England and Wales under the Banking and Financial Dealings Act 1971.

9B.—(1) An authority responsible for dealing with applications for permits under the London Lorry Ban Order shall make arrangements enabling applications under paragraph 9A above to be made at any time.

(2) Once an application for a permit has been made under paragraph 9A above, then, for the purpose of any relevant journey, the application shall be treated as granted subject to such conditions as the Secretary of State may by order specify for the purposes of this provision.

(3) A journey is a relevant journey for the purposes of sub–paragraph (2) above if it is begun before the authority to which the application is made has communicated its decision on the application to the applicant by telephone or by means of facsimile transmission.

(4) If an application under paragraph 9A above has been granted, or is treated as granted, then, while the vehicle concerned is undertaking a journey covered by the application, paragraph 4 of the London Lorry Ban Order and of the Westminster Lorry Ban Order shall have effect in relation to it with the substitution for paragraph (a) of—

"(a) in relation to any goods vehicle being driven by any person in a restricted street during the prescribed hours in respect of which an application under paragraph 9A of Schedule 9 to the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act 1996 has been granted, or is treated as granted, provided that any conditions subject to which the application is granted, or treated as granted, are complied with; or".

(5) The power to make an order under sub–paragraph (2) above includes—

(a) power to make different provision for different cases, and

(b) power to make an order varying or revoking any order previously made under that provision.

(6) In this paragraph—

"the London Lorry Ban Order" has the same meaning as in paragraph 9 above; and

"the Westminster Lorry Ban Order means the City of Westminster (Restriction of Goods Vehicles) Traffic Order 1992.")

Mr. Watts: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

The amendment honours an assurance given during proceedings in another place and, as some hon. Members may know, it was the subject of much debate during the latter stages of the Bill's passage through the other House. It concerns the way in which the London boroughs traffic

scheme, otherwise known as the lorry ban, should be dealt with during the period of construction of this piece of rail infrastructure.

Mr. Bradley: I have a few words to say on the amendment, because it is worth noting that there was considerable discussion and not a little controversy about the way in which the current London lorry ban order would be changed to facilitate the construction of the rail link.

The contention effectively centred on the attempt to include the cost-effective manner in which the lorry ban would be changed. There was great concern that the cost-effective provision would allow the lorries involved in construction to use minor roads or roads through residential areas that proved more cost-effective than usual routes; and that the time limit would not be long enough for the authority to notify the applicant for changes to the lorry ban of its decision. As the Minister pointed out on Third Reading, the words "cost-effective" were removed and the London boroughs transport scheme has accepted the need for appeals against the imposition of conditions that might obstruct the carrying out of the works to go to the Secretary of State for determination. We are pleased that those requirements have now been included in the Bill.

While we do not wish to inhibit the construction in any way, it is essential that there is recognition of the need to protect the local environment and local residents and that all the new measures involved in the amendment are complied with. I am sure that the Minister, on behalf of the Secretary of State, will diligently monitor the changes to the so-called London lorry ban, while not undermining the original intention behind the scheme, which is to ensure quiet enjoyment of certain areas.

Again, excellent work has been undertaken in the other place to allow us to accept the amendments. The nature of the debate and the detailed way in which the other House undertook consideration of those matters have, again, helped to limit the amount of time that we need to spend debating them tonight. I am sure that, before we complete our deliberations on the amendment, the Minister will give an assurance that the new arrangements will be diligently monitored and adhered to, and, with that, we shall support the amendment tonight.

Mr. Watts: I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 98 and 99 agreed to.

Schedule 13

PROTECTIVE PROVISIONS

Lords amendment: No. 100, in page 204, line 19, leave out ("statutory")

Mr. Watts: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments Nos. 101 to 139 and 183 to 185.

Mr. Bradley: Before we conclude our consideration of the Lords amendments, it is important that we note that, through the procedures adopted in the House—especially the work in the Chamber of the other place and the Select Committee procedure there—we now have a considerably better Bill than we would have had if that work had not been so diligently undertaken.

At every stage, Opposition Members have tried to facilitate the Bill's progress. Many of us feel that it was unduly delayed in the past and we are most anxious to ensure that there is no significant delay in future. Clearly, scrutiny is important and it will continue. It is also essential that the project is monitored to ensure that the developers and, ultimately, the operators comply with the conditions of the Bill when it is enacted.

We want to ensure that this important project is completed as soon as possible, to maximise the future potential of the channel tunnel and to maximise the links that it will make, not only to London, but throughout the country. In the light of the Minister's assurances that all necessary work is now under way for the upgrading of the west coast main line to Manchester and beyond, we must also maximise the benefits of that rail link. This is a project of national importance and significance, and we hope that it will now be proceeded with, with all due haste.

Mr. Watts: The expeditious way in which the House has dealt with about 100 amendments this evening has given the project a strong following wind. The Bill was subjected to careful scrutiny by a Select Committee of this House. All the members of that Committee worked extremely well together, under the able chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant)—in fact, I believe that they set a new record for the length of time spent in Committee on a Bill such as this, but they did not waste time in concentrating on making necessary improvements to the Bill.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the Bill that we shall pass this evening for Royal Assent is a much better Bill than the one that was introduced in this House in January 1995. Of particular note has been the provision of a further station at Stratford, with the enormous regeneration benefits that that will bring to east London. I am grateful to hon. Members on both sides of the House for approaching the Bill and the project in a constructive and co-operative manner. As the hon. Gentleman said, this is a project of national significance and it is right that it has support from all sections of this nation's Parliament.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 101 to 185 agreed to.

7.47 pm

Sitting suspended.

10 pm

On resuming—

It being Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *pursuant to paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates), put the deferred Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on Vote on Account, 1997-98 (Clause XVII, Vote 1).*

Resolved,

That a sum, not exceeding £78,288,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for or towards defraying the charges for the year ending on 31st March 1998 for

expenditure by the Office of the Minister for Public Service on the central management of the Civil Service; expenditure resulting from the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's chairmanship of the BSE Implementation Committee; expenditure on privatisation of executive agencies; and certain other services.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Questions required to be put, pursuant to paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 53 (Questions on voting of estimates &c.).*

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1996–97

Resolved,

That a supplementary sum, not exceeding £2,424,973,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges for defence and civil services which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1997, as set out in HC 18 of Session 1996–97.

ESTIMATES, 1997–98 (VOTE ON ACCOUNT)

Resolved,

That a further sum, not exceeding £96,783,374,000, be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for or towards defraying the charges for defence and civil services in Classes I to XVI; Class XVII, Votes 2 to 3; Class XVIII; and Classes XVIII, A and XVIII, B for the year ending on 31st March 1998, as set out in HC 19, 20 and 21 of Session 1996–97.

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the foregoing Resolutions by the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. William Waldegrave, Mr. Michael Jack, Mrs. Angela Knight and Mr. Phillip Oppenheim.

CONSOLIDATED FUND BILL

Mr. Michael Jack accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain funds out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the year ending on 31 March 1997; And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time, and to be printed [Bill 50].

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith, pursuant to Order [6 December] and Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith, and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is my understanding that the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges has considered its report and that Members have been told to remain silent when it is produced tomorrow at 3.30 pm, yet I understand that members of the press are being briefed on that. Will you, start an inquiry to find out who has breached this understanding, so that the House should know these matters before the press should know?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): It is for the Committee to decide whether a matter has been leaked from that Committee and if there is such a leak, it will be for that Committee to investigate the matter of that particular leak. It is not a matter for the Chair.

Party Political Radio Broadcasts

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

10.3 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): Love them or loathe them, party political broadcasts are part of the British way of life. They substitute for the American practice where political commercials are bought on radio and television, and the richer the candidate, the more commercials he can buy. That, I believe, creates a gross distortion of democracy. In this country, the Head of Government need not be a multi-millionaire.

A distortion exists in this country as well. I welcome the opportunity this evening to draw the House's attention to a significant denial of access for exposure of important political argument on national radio. That iniquitous omission has not received attention until now, and as a result we have acquiesced in permitting unequal obligations to be placed upon national commercial radio and the publicly funded broadcasters—the BBC—in respect of party political and election broadcasts. Extraordinary as it may seem, it is the BBC, and not independent national radio, that is failing to deliver across all the national networks.

I am addressing the matter now because we have seen from recent press reports that the Radio Authority—which is responsible for the three national commercial radio channels, as well as independent local radio—has announced a requirement that each of those carry party political broadcasts.

The broadcasting legislation requires the authority to include a suitable licence condition for those national licensees and, as a result of extensive recent discussions, the Radio Authority has put in place a structure to ensure that Talk Radio UK, Classic FM and Virgin Radio carry party political broadcasts for the main parties. That will mean that party election broadcasts will be carried on those channels, representing a real step forward in the opening up of the political process to important audiences.

Of course the commercial companies have greeted that with varying degrees of enthusiasm. I believe that one of those companies thinks that such broadcasts might encourage listeners to turn off. Surely that cannot be true. Generally, it has been encouraging to see the way in which the commercial companies have adopted the Radio Authority's ruling and got on with making proper arrangements. The first party political broadcasts on commercial radio were heard on Talk Radio UK and Classic FM while some of us were at Bournemouth and were otherwise occupied.

I received a letter today by courier from Paul Robinson, who is the general manager of Talk Radio UK. He points out in his letter that

"Talk Radio is the only national speech competitor to the BBC. . . We believe that our role is to offer 'Democracy Direct'"—

as he puts it. Mr. Robinson continues:

" Our audience is currently just under two and a half million and growing. . . On Parliamentary Broadcasts our view is to welcome them. We regard these broadcasts as part of the democratic process, of which we are a key component, and believe that they stimulate debate and discussion in the country. The only issue for Talk Radio is the inequity of the situation in which the BBC's national stations are not all obliged to carry PPBs, unlike independent national radio."

It will probably be assumed that that means that all the national radio services are now playing their proper part in promoting our parliamentary democracy. I had assumed so, but I find that I am wrong. Only two out of the five BBC national radio channels carry party political broadcasts, or will carry party election broadcasts. Radio 1 does not do so, Radio 3 does not do so, and even Radio 5 Live—set up with a fanfare to be a demotic news and speech network—makes no provision for that type of broadcast.

Why must Virgin Radio carry party political broadcasts, when Radio 1 does not? Why must Classic FM carry party political broadcasts, when Radio 3 does not? Why must Talk Radio UK carry party political broadcasts, when Radio 5 Live does not? The BBC claims to be the defender of public service broadcasting and often belittles commercial radio. I think that the BBC has a case to answer.

There is obviously something wrong. I can see no justification for Radio 5 failing to carry PPBs. As my right hon. Friend—I say that advisedly—the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) would probably remind us, what goes out on Radio 3 is all too often a mystery to everyone, but the exclusion of party political broadcasts and party election broadcasts from BBC Radio 1 is particularly anti-democratic.

Radio 1 is the BBC network that most appeals to young people; indeed, according to audience research, it is virtually the only BBC radio channel—national or local—that primarily attracts listeners of my age, your age, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and younger! The education of young people in the political process is a key factor in the continuance of our parliamentary democracy.

The BBC makes great play about the social responsibility of Radio 1—or at least it did at the time of the charter renewal—and it deserves genuine praise for programmes such as "Newsbeat", which I had the honour of working on many years ago when it was first broadcast. However, when it comes to reflecting the political process to its 11 million listeners through party broadcasts—particularly party election broadcasts—the BBC is suddenly less forthcoming.

How can it be right that the main television channels carry PPBs, that national commercial radio stations such as Virgin Radio carry PPBs, but the BBC shuts the door to Radio 1, Radio 3 and Radio 5 in such an arbitrary manner? In these days of soundbite politics—much beloved of the Labour party—does it not seem surprising that that unique opportunity to explore issues in more depth is not seized by all BBC networks, as it will be in the 21 broadcasts to be aired by their commercial counterparts? If I may digress for a moment, was it not revealing that, while Virgin and Capital FM observed the two-minute silence on Armistice day, Radio 1 did not?

The BBC must recognise that it has significantly more than the lion's share of the available national frequencies. In particular, it enjoys the resources for four FM networks while the commercial side has only one. Despite that fact, commercial radio now attracts more listeners than the BBC. It has not been easy for the independent sector to reflect the full colour of the political spectrum on national services whose transmission arrangements do not lend themselves to more localised opting out.

Whereas the BBC may allocate broadcasts on its Scottish and Welsh national regional services to parties contesting constituencies in those regions alone, independent national radio has had to make scarce time available on its United Kingdom-wide services for those nationalist party broadcasts. As a result, my constituents in Staffordshire and others elsewhere will have to feast their ears on the intricacies of internal Welsh and Scottish issues. We can only hope that the party political broadcasts by Plaid Cymru, transmitted throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland by Classic FM, Virgin Radio and Talk Radio UK, will at least be broadcast in English rather than Welsh—although, on second thoughts, perhaps Welsh would be better.

If the corporation is to continue to justify having a four to one share of national FM channels, it will need to provide more convincing evidence that it is meeting its much vaunted public service remit. That remit cannot be validated only where the BBC chooses. In the case of party political broadcasts, it is not enough for the corporation to move them to the older and less populist preserves of Radio 4 and Radio 2 purely because that is the way it was in the days of the Home Service and the light programme. Time has marched on and, since 1967, it has been BBC Radio by numbers—although it seems that someone at the BBC still cannot count from one to five.

The political process is entitled to the broad exposure that the deliberately popular services of Radio 1 and Radio 5 Live would provide. Why should the Radio 1 audience be deprived of the same level of political education that is compulsorily available to Virgin Radio listeners? If Classic FM can carry party political broadcasts, why not Radio 3? After all, in classical music programming, the commercial station has more than given the BBC a run for its money—or should I say our money, as it is the licence payers' funds? Great things are at stake at the next election—employment, mortgage rates and the very sovereignty of our nation. All that could be thrown away if there is a change of Government.

I believe that Parliament would be right to insist that the BBC look again at its arrangements for party political broadcasts on radio. In the past year, the House has granted the BBC a renewal of its charter—which I know that some of my hon. Friends did not welcome. In the debates about that renewal, and in much discussion and presentation outside this House, we have heard about the BBC's role in preserving the nation's heritage. It is right that we should have that in mind, and right that we should look to the BBC to be a stalwart defender of that heritage.

The electoral process is surely at least as much a central part of the British heritage as the broadcast of live coverage of the cup final. With the fate of our nation hanging on an electoral thread, the BBC cannot have it both ways, and the Government should be pressing the corporation to ensure that there is proper access right across the board—right across all five networks.

If the BBC thinks it right to broadcast party political broadcasts on Radios 2 and 4, why does it think that it is not right to broadcast them on Radios, 1, 3 and 5? It must make up its mind. That inconsistency must be addressed.

In any event, I believe that we shall have to look at the rules again. It costs £1,000 to put up one candidate, so under the rules only £50,000 would buy time on BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4, Virgin Radio, Classic FM, Talk Radio UK and—currently—BBC Radios 2 and 4. Where can one buy five minutes of national television time for just £50,000—let alone on all networks?

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

What if Cadbury were to put up 50 chocolate party candidates, or, more worryingly, what if the pro-abortion or anti-abortion lobbies were to put up candidates? What if a racist or similarly sinister party were to put up candidates? Either way, it is time for Government to revisit this issue.

10.16 pm

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Staffordshire (Mr. Fabricant) on securing the debate. This is probably an opportune time to discuss such an issue, given that party political broadcasts will play an increasingly significant role for political parties, viewers and listeners as we approach the next general election. For many years, broadcasters have offered time for the main political parties to present their policies to the electorate, and I certainly share the view that the major political parties in the United Kingdom should have direct access to television and radio.

As Lord Annan's committee commented in its 1977 report on the future of broadcasting, political parties are there to provide the statesmen and policies to govern the country, and the country's media should provide them with an opportunity to address the people. Broadcasting has a crucial role to play, through its ability to reach almost every home in the United Kingdom, to inform the public debate.

My hon. Friend has voiced his concerns about the implications of party political broadcasts for national commercial radio stations. I know that he has discussed these with the Radio Authority in the light of the authority's press announcement of 12 September, which established the new arrangements for party political broadcasts on national commercial radio. That is significant, as it is the first time that the requirement to carry party political broadcasts, introduced by the Broadcasting Act 1990, has been applied to national commercial radio stations.

I agree with the my hon. Friend's view that the arrangements represent a real step in opening up the political process to audiences, but I also recognise that this is a new situation and that, as broadcasting develops, especially with the introduction of digital channels and a greater abundance of channels, the regulators and Parliament will want to keep the arrangements under review.

My hon. Friend may be aware that it was only after some hesitation that matters of political controversy were allowed on the ether, then known as the wireless—from March 1928, in fact. In reviewing the success of that experiment, the Ullswater committee in 1936 set the ground rules for future arrangements for party political broadcasts, which were essentially that the allocation of time for such broadcasts should be agreed between the broadcaster—at that time, of course, only the BBC—and the political parties. As the committee recommended,

"The BBC must, of course, continue to be the judge of the amount of political broadcasting which the programme will stand".

With the advent of commercial television broadcasting, the arrangements for agreeing the allocation of time were replicated, with both the BBC and independent television authorities agreeing the allocation of time in close co-operation with political parties. Crucial to the way in which those arrangements developed is that the Government did not seek to determine the allocation of airtime—not only for the reason Ullswater stated, but because it would be wrong for the Government to seek to interfere with broadcasters over a matter in which the Government would have a particular, politically partisan interest.

The current framework for party political broadcasts on commercial channels was established by the Broadcasting Act 1990. In the Bill, as published, the Government sought to transfer directly into the new broadcasting regime the arrangements subsisting between the BBC and the Independent Broadcasting Authority and the political parties—by granting discretion to the regulators to agree arrangements with the political parties. There was a lively debate about the merits of party political broadcasts and some support in the House for ending altogether PPBs on commercial television. Those were the days—fresh in the minds of some—of such great works as "Kinnock—The Movie".

In his reply to that debate, the then Minister of State, Home Office, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), emphasised that the presence of party political broadcasts on both the BBC and commercial broadcasters was not too high a price to pay for the absence of political advertising. That view has been endorsed by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Staffordshire.

Hon. Members may be aware that provisions in the 1990 Act prohibit advertising inserted by or on behalf of any body whose objects are wholly or mainly of a political nature or which is directed towards any political end.

Mr. Fabricant: My hon. Friend will be aware that Amnesty International is currently appealing, and suggesting that its advertising is not politically motivated. Does he agree that that would be contrary to the spirit of the decision taken by the House during the passage of the 1990 legislation?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend raises an extremely interesting point. I think that Amnesty International was specifically mentioned in the debate, and that that point was considered by the Committee. I should like to refresh myself on the Committee's exact words, but certainly my recollection is that the House of Commons, and therefore the Houses of Parliament, decided that it did not want a body such as Amnesty—as marvellous and splendid as it is in many ways—to be allowed to advertise. I do not know the details of the case mentioned by my hon. Friend, but I should be very surprised if a court of law, on appeal or in any other circumstances, sought to overturn a clear decision expressed in a specific debate of a Committee of the House, which was then endorsed by the House of Commons and by the House of Lords. It is such an interesting point that I should like to examine it later in more detail.

The aim of the provisions is to protect viewers and listeners from intrusive political or politically motivated and campaigning advertising, and to avoid broadcast advertising becoming part of the political process. I believe that the American model of political advertising is decidedly not something that we want to witness in the United Kingdom, given its risk of diluting the quality of political debate.

When the 1990 legislation was considered in Committee, it appeared that the new relationship to be established between the new broadcasting regulatory bodies—the Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority—and the licensed broadcasters, within a clear statutory framework, risked doing away with the established practice of providing party political broadcasts on commercial channels. Parliament decided that the discretion that the old Independent Broadcasting Authority had possessed should become a duty in respect of Channels 3 and 4 and the national commercial radio services.

When moving Government amendments to give expression to the will of the Standing Committee, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney explained:

"The reason for the Government amendments is to take account of the fact that the IBA was the broadcaster and could therefore direct the various constituent companies of the ITV network to show party political broadcasts. The ITC will not be the broadcaster. Therefore we require a statutory framework".—[*Official Report*, 9 May 1990; Vol. 172, c. 203.]

The same principle was applied to radio.

The constitutional position of the BBC was not changed, and I have noted my hon. Friend's comments that there is no specific requirement on the BBC to carry party political broadcasts on each of its five national radio stations. I understand that, at present, only BBC Radio 2 and Radio 4 carry them. The Radio Authority drew attention to that when it announced its arrangements for party political broadcasts on national commercial radio on 12 September.

The number of party political broadcasts to be broadcast on national commercial radio is equivalent to the number broadcast on BBC Radio 2—up to two PPBs for the Conservative party and the Labour party and one for the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru, with the scheduling being determined by the broadcasters within certain parameters. That is not, I believe, an onerous obligation. For the BBC, however, Radio 2's output of party political broadcasts would, under current arrangements, be augmented by a further 18 party political broadcasts on Radio 4, divided between the main political parties in the United Kingdom. This, to me, does not suggest that the BBC is neglecting its public service responsibilities in respect of party political broadcasting; rather, it shows that the corporation is committed to providing a range of party political programming that caters for the interests of the parties and the public.

Furthermore, the BBC has wide-ranging public service obligations, including a specific obligation to broadcast an impartial account of the proceedings in both Houses of Parliament, and to ensure that political matters are widely and seriously considered in programmes across all its services.

That said, I acknowledge that the arrangements for specifically party political broadcasts on the BBC differ from those for national commercial radio stations. That is partly a function of the different arrangements under which the broadcasters are constituted. The BBC is one broadcaster operating a range of channels, while the national radio licensees operate only one channel under each licence. The BBC's arrangements have been agreed in the light of discussions with the political parties. As far as I am aware, the main political parties have been broadly satisfied with the arrangements for party political broadcasts on BBC Radio, although some smaller parties would prefer to increase their allocations. In general, for many decades the BBC has held a difficult ring. It is open to the parties to put forward alternative proposals if they wish.

I remain of the view that this is not an area in which Government should be prescriptive. It must remain for the BBC, the ITC and the Radio Authority to agree the appropriate allocation of time for party political broadcasts in close co-operation with the political parties. Parliament determined that the national commercial licensees should be required to carry PPBs and it is for the regulators to ensure that the particular obligations are fair and reasonable, making different provision for different cases or circumstances, as provided by the Act.

The arrangements for PPBs are an important contribution to the political process. I do not believe that the allocations of time agreed currently could reasonably be considered to blunt the competitive edge of our commercial broadcasters. If those slots are taken up by the political parties, it will clearly be in their interests to make their broadcasts as attractive as possible.

Decisions about the provision of airtime for party political broadcasts, including the scheduling arrangements, are properly matters for the broadcasters and the regulatory authorities. We do not seek to intervene in the decisions and have no plans to impose a requirement specifying how or when the BBC or other broadcasters should carry party political broadcasts. That is a matter that an independent BBC must negotiate with the political parties.

I believe that the arrangements for party political broadcasts work satisfactorily in the United Kingdom. They provide for the main political parties a vehicle on commercial and public service television and radio by which to communicate directly with the public. That is carried out within a framework that correctly leaves with the broadcasters the responsibility for maintaining a proper balance between different points of view and the maintenance of editorial standards.

The openness of our broadcasting media to the democratic process is one of the strengths of our system and reflects the independence of our media from Government control. It is a luxury denied to many other countries. The presence of party political broadcasts on terrestrial television and radio saves us from the perils of expensive and intrusive political advertising.

There is no doubt that the position between BBC Radio and the national commercial channels differs: it is never possible to make things exactly the same between competing channels, but the structure that has been established provides a proper forum for determining a fair spread of PPBs. In a fast-changing broadcasting world, we and the regulators will want to keep the formal arrangements under review. I do not accept, however, that the current arrangements demonstrate any manifest failure of the BBC's public service remit. The arrangements in place have been established through a process of consensus and negotiation. Any changes may be agreed between the key players—the broadcasters, the broadcasting regulatory authorities and the main political parties. That is democracy in action.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 11 December 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Unfunded Pension Liabilities (European Union)

[*Relevant document: The First Report from the Social Security Committee of Session 1996–97, on Unfunded Pension Liabilities in the European Union (HC 23).*]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I am grateful to you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity that the House has of taking note of the report that the Select Committee on Social Security published a few weeks ago on unfunded pension liabilities in Europe.

Before I introduce the House to the ideas in the report, I shall make a few prefatory remarks. The first is that it is now clear that it is difficult for anyone to contribute to issues relating to Europe and expect a sensible response from some colleagues.

The report was made unanimously by the Select Committee, whose members comprise people who are sceptical about Europe and people who are pro-Europe. On this particular occasion—it is not always so—everyone came to the Committee wishing to strengthen the report rather than wreck or undermine it. It was published and issued to the House because we thought that this was a national issue in which we had an advantage over the rest of Europe, and we were motivated by a love of our country rather than by any more basic partisan motives stemming from being pro-Europe or anti-Europe.

Both those in the House who oppose Europe and those who are pro-Europe managed to seize on the report and talk about it when it was clear that neither faction had actually read it. That is a great pity, because I think that it is the shortest report that we have published.

We are aware that we move in dangerous times when we discuss dispassionately anything about Europe. But those were my motives in wishing to publish the report to the House. It was a natural feeling about one's affections for one's country; not wishing to see a real advantage be unnecessarily lost. We do not think that putting the interests of one's country first makes one a bad European. Some of us deeply resent those who argue that if one raises anything that is pro-British, one must be anti-European.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in years to come, British pensioners will be far and away the best protected pensioners in Europe, far ahead of the French and Germans, who are having such difficulty in funding their pensions?

Mr. Field: The Committee's approach was that, while one would expect the House to divide on party lines with regard to how well placed all British pensioners are, it is difficult to deny the fact that some British pensioners are now well placed because of the funded pension schemes that are in operation. We also took the view that, as other countries try to make adjustments so that their social security liabilities are ones that taxpayers will meet in future, people across Europe are taking to the streets to try to prevent their Governments making those adjustments.

I shall come to that in a moment, because one of our concerns is how our position may be adversely affected by Governments who cannot make the changes that they may need to make through the normal democratic process, because other ways are open to them if their electorate block them on the streets. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that intervention.

This is not a report about funded pensions. It would be possible for the Select Committee—and we may wish to do this—to consider how a single currency could both advantageously and disadvantageously affect the extent of funded pension schemes in Britain. Yesterday evening, the National Association of Pension Funds issued a briefing on the issue to hon. Members. I am not, however, concerned with that in this debate, which is about Britain's peculiar position of having more funded pension liabilities than the whole of Europe put together.

I am glad to see the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies). Given his facile comments about the Select Committee's report, I could not believe that he had read it.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I speak as someone who has read the report. Does my hon. Friend not believe that it is weakened by this statement in paragraph 10:

"The only sustainable long term solution is to build up the level of personal funded pensions"?

Is it not true that, uncharacteristically for my hon. Friend, the report seems to have been presented by a Committee with a closed mind?

Mr. Field: I suppose that, in one way, the Committee did have a closed mind, in that we did not believe that the politics of the 1970s, which my hon. Friend promotes, are sustainable. If I were considering the issue in the early 1970s, I would probably go down his road and say that we could introduce something such as the state earnings-related pension scheme, which could be sustainable. The plain fact is that we now have—certainly on the Government Benches and to some extent on the Labour Benches—agreement that that approach is not sustainable. It is a deceit, therefore, to say to the electorate that we can guarantee, via a state scheme, a pension level that clearly one and perhaps both major parties in the House do not believe is sustainable.

The only way in which we can guarantee the viability of such an approach and that it will not cheat future pensioners, is either to win every future election—and we have had some difficulty in winning the past four or so elections—or to abolish elections. Otherwise, there is no

[Mr. Field]

guarantee that a future Government will not undo what we might wish to have in a state earnings-related pension scheme.

When we compare like with like, we must be careful not to have a closed mind to attacking funded schemes because, as a result of action by Treasury Ministers, the pensions of people in SERPS have been halved and their pension expectations halved again. We did not have a closed mind, therefore, in suggesting that taking the state option is not a viable or sustainable possibility. We have a closed mind only to the extent that we do not believe that we should shut out what happened in the 1980s, when the consensus between the two parties for a state approach disappeared.

We further believe, with our closed mind, that the only way in which we can stop future Governments disrupting people's pension expectations is for those people to own their own capital, so that, if future Governments try that, they will be treated severely at the ballot box. In one way, therefore, my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) is right. We have a closed mind. We have a closed mind to the state option, which the Committee does not believe is viable.

If we were having the debate in the early 1970s, I would probably be putting out the line that Barbara Castle and her cohorts then put out and continue to put out, although I now believe that to be dangerous nonsense.

Mr. Flynn: It is suggested not that SERPS should continue in its present form, but that it should be in a new form that will be independent and funded, which will invest some of its funds on the stock exchange, and where the money will be linked to the person paying in. I am sure that it is not beyond the wit of the next Government to devise a scheme that can survive possible Governments of a different colour. If we can sell the idea of SERPS as a good-value pension, it can continue and be unassailable to political change.

Mr. Field: My hon. Friend gives the game away because he says "funded". That is the very antithesis of what SERPS is—a pay-as-you-go scheme, where Governments of both parties have only too willingly pushed pension liabilities into the future for future taxpayers to meet. That is the reason why the report was published: to draw attention to the relative strength of the British position vis-à-vis Europe.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the line that he is beginning to take, but five years or more ago, there was not much support for my proposal to give people in the national insurance scheme stakeholder rights. I now believe that the debate has moved on so quickly that no one in his right mind thinks that it is safe to leave his pension funds with the state as guardian. We hear lots of talk about how dangerous it is, about Maxwell and so on, but the Maxwell theft pales into insignificance compared with what the Government have done to SERPS. They have halved it and halved it again. I am pleased therefore that my hon. Friend is talking about funded schemes; even in his constituency and even with his leadership on the issue, his electorate will not choose an option whereby we allow the Government to get their sticky fingers on our funds.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid–Kent): The hon. Gentleman has, I am sure, been approached by Maurice Oldfield of the Pre Retirement Association, which, anxious about the unscrupulous selling of private pension schemes, has tried to evolve a system whereby, as in the National Savings system, there is some state involvement in the creation of such funded private schemes. Would the hon. Gentleman care to say anything about that?

Mr. Field: When I reintroduce a Bill for National Savings pension schemes run through the Post Office, I must approach the hon. Gentleman for a bi-partisan report on that. I do not claim that it is a new idea. Mr. Gladstone introduced the proposal, which some powerful insurance companies managed to destroy, so I do not underestimate the power of the market when it feels that it is challenged. What I am in a sense disappointed about in relation to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West is that we could have agreed because, although we are talking about success here—the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett–Bowman) raised the point that some pensioners are in an advantageous position—we have far too many very poor pensioners. Another Select Committee report will consider how one might deal with spreading the success that many pensioners experience to all pensioners. There I am in total agreement with my hon. Friend.

The nature of the report is simple. We have considered the extraordinary position that Great Britain is in, having more funded pension assets to meet future liabilities than the whole of Europe put together. We were concerned about how, within a new single currency arrangement, that position might be undermined. We found three possible ways in which that might occur.

First, if Governments find it difficult to balance their budgets to allow for adjustments, perhaps because of violence on the streets, they may seek to raise money by issuing bonds. We know perfectly well that Governments make those bonds more attractive by raising interest rates. Britain would not have to do that as we do not face the same unfunded liabilities as other countries, but we might be affected by higher interest rates abroad. Even if we did not join a single currency, the British economy would not be immune to the trend in interest rates elsewhere. It is not a simple matter. The single currency will affect us directly or indirectly.

Secondly, Governments can opt for what was historically considered to be the easy option. When they are faced with liabilities that they cannot meet, they can print money. We can assume that that will not happen through the new European central bank. However, the chairman of the Bundesbank has expressed his anxiety in that respect. He is fearful that when he has to share responsibility for issuing the currency affecting Germany with bankers from other countries who may take a different line on inflation—often for the simple reason that those countries have not suffered the same terrible history of inflation—the decisions will not be as strong as those taken by the Bundesbank to ensure that the currency is not devalued by printing money.

Thirdly, Britain may be asked to share the cost of other countries being less careful about meeting future pension liabilities. It was not mentioned in the report, so I mention it now. The European Community is not static. It is rightly an evolving organisation. It is quite possible that, in future, countries will acknowledge publicly what they have clearly acknowledged privately—that they have serious financial problems in meeting future pension

liabilities—and declare it to be a new European issue that requires a European strategy. Although that would be good for many of our European colleagues, it would not be a sensible approach for Britain to take, as we might have to carry some of the costs.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): The hon. Gentleman has raised an important point. Does he accept that each member country of the European Union is protected from any requirement to meet the national debts of other countries? Britain or any other country, therefore, would be protected should another country experience the difficulties that he has just described.

Mr. Field: Article 104 of the Maastricht treaty covers that eventuality. My concern is that the convergence criteria for the single currency are inadequate. They take into account only the smallest part of public debt and exclude the largest part. As a result, Britain may end up in the extraordinary position of being the only country that could enter the single currency without having fiddled the balance sheet, but we are the most restive about it. The countries that are most keen to enter will be those that have not met even the limited convergence criteria on public debt and have behind the scenes significant public debt that does not come into the present equation. The third and most controversial recommendation of the Select Committee relates directly to the point that the hon. Gentleman made.

Before concluding, let me draw attention to two reports that have been published since the Select Committee report. The first is the briefing by the Institute of Directors on unfunded pension liability. One of the headings in that report is, "The unfunded pensions fudge". It expresses the opinion that we should not consider joining a single currency until we have examined more comprehensively the problem of public debt.

The other report—which one would not expect to be particularly sympathetic to the Select Committee report—is that produced by the Kingsdown Enquiry, which examines all aspects of the single currency much more comprehensively. I draw the attention of the House to the section on pensions and the comments of Professor John Kay. He makes a powerful case for joining a single currency and submits that monetary union would produce not only lower inflation, but more stable inflation rates.

The Select Committee does not attempt to suggest that our report should be the basis of any decision as to whether Britain enters a single currency, but says that it should be part of the debate as to what is in the national interest. Let me quote Professor John Kay. After he had set out the advantages of the single currency,

> "The main risk that he saw in monetary union was that the very large government budget liabilities of unfunded state pensions schemes in other European countries could turn out to be a time bomb that would put the stability of the whole system under strain."

The Select Committee made precisely the same point. Given all the fuss that we made, hon. Members might find our conclusion inadequate.

Our conclusion was threefold. First, we recommended that the Government should publish the relevant information in the Red Book, so that we could look comprehensively at our unfunded public sector pension liabilities. Secondly, we recommended that the Government should propose to the Council of Ministers that other countries should publish similar accounts.

Our third and most controversial recommendation relates to the comments made by the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone). We drew attention to article 104c of the Maastricht treaty and asked whether it would apply if countries' unfunded pension liabilities were destabilising any future single currency. Although I consider that to be a controversial recommendation, it merely asked whether we would be protected by the Maastricht treaty.

I am sorry that I have spent so long introducing a short report. That is partly because of the interest expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West and because of our commitments in respect of the poorest pensioners in Britain and how to enable them to share the prosperity enjoyed by an increasing number of pensioners. That prosperity results from our funded pension scheme. I am sure that the House joins me in wishing to spread that success to all pensioners. However, that is not the basis of our report. The Select Committee will be producing a report on that subject, but we find it sensible to limit ourselves to manageable topics rather than taking the whole world as our canvas.

The Select Committee has made a limited contribution to an important debate about whether Britain should enter a single currency. Despite the Chancellor of the Exchequer's enthusiasm immediately to reply to our report by way of a planted question, we know that the Secretary of State for Social Security will reply before the House rises for the Christmas recess. We look forward to hearing the comments of our colleagues, the line taken by my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) and the Minister's reply to the debate.

9.59 am

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I thank the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) not only for introducing the subject but for its prominence due to the way in which the Select Committee has approached its work under his chairmanship.

I first raised the issue in a written question in 1991 because I began to sense that serious liabilities in Europe were not being included in national accounts; they were being left out. I asked the Treasury not only about unfunded pension liabilities but about the effect of French nuclear reactor decommissioning costs and liabilities which might be incurred in the repair, maintenance and rebuilding of public buildings throughout Europe.

To my way of thinking as an accountant, those categories represent three of the largest potential liabilities of any set of nation states that is contemplating a single currency and—possibly—ultimately putting national accounts together in one form, however loose or tight that form may be, under single currency arrangements. The liabilities could be truly horrendous. The French nuclear reactor decommissioning costs are estimated to be £200 billion. No one has thought how that will be dealt with in the next century when such costs come on line and no one, so far as I am aware, has made any estimate of capital building, repair and maintenance cost liabilities in Europe.

The Treasury considered the question that I asked in 1991 a little eccentric, and did not have any detailed information on the issues. I did not receive a full reply with detailed figures and estimates and it has been very difficult since then to get some figures that the House

[Mr. David Shaw]

could discuss. In the intervening period, I was pleased that the matter was taken on board elsewhere and that estimates of liabilities were produced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the International Monetary Fund and ABP, the Dutch pensions fund. Some quite respectable organisations in the City are also now producing estimates. Although they range widely because they concern some very broad figures that can change in certain circumstances, a pattern is beginning to emerge.

I drew the pattern to the attention of the House on 5 June at column 573 and I am pleased that, as a result, the hon. Member for Birkenhead ensured that the Social Security Committee investigated the matter. Other members of the Committee and I also visited Brussels to talk to European Commissioners. That was especially significant because we found that the European Commission was about as advanced in its answers in 1996 as the Treasury was to the same questions in 1991. The European Commission was not very advanced in its consideration of the issue and did not welcome the fact that we were asking a series of questions. In many ways, it seemed to prefer not to be asked questions and wanted decisions to be left to the European Commissioners.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my hon. Friend agree that so often when we are trying to lead the way into uncharted and difficult waters, we are castigated as being the awkward squad, when in fact we are taking a lead and trying to get Europe to behave in very much better ways, such as on pensions, as the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said?

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend is correct. Here we are trying to get a discussion out in the open and trying to show that, as in British democracy, the issue can be tackled in open public debate. Yet the emphasis elsewhere in Europe seems to be on not having open discussion and debate as the British do. In Europe they seem to want to close the discussion down and quietly sort it out in due course if they can, but the horrendous nature of the liabilities makes that impossible. The fundamental point is that just because the liabilities are called unfunded pension liabilities does not mean that they will not become real cash liabilities at some stage in the future. They may not be real cash liabilities tomorrow, but in a few years' time they may be, and by the turn of the millennium they certainly will be.

The IMF has made some substantial estimates. I do not want to quote large chunks of its May 1996 world economic outlook, but I shall refer to one or two relevant passages. For example, it says:

"Future generations of workers will face either much higher tax burdens to maintain such levels of transfers or sharply reduced benefits levels . . . For the German pension plan's net asset position in 2050 to be the same as the initial net asset position in 1995, for instance, a sustainable contribution rate of 13.7 per cent. will be required each year. Assuming average contribution rates remain unchanged at just 10.3 per cent. of GDP over this period, Germany would appear to face a contribution gap of 3.4 per cent. of GDP."

My hon. Friends will realise the significance of such a gap, given that one of the Maastricht criteria requires member states' annual deficits to be within 3 per cent. of gross domestic product. One item alone—pension liabilities—could blow the German budget right through one of the Maastricht criteria from 2000 or 2004 onwards.

The IMF report goes on to say:

"Countries such as Japan, Germany and France, however, face contribution gaps of nearly 3.5 per cent. of GDP a year. To avoid a further build up of pension debt over the next 55 years, these countries need either to permanently increase social security tax collections by roughly 3.5 per cent. of GDP or scale back benefits by a similar amount or implement a combination of tax increases and pay-out reductions of this magnitude. In countries like France, and especially Italy, where retirement often takes place at a relatively early age, raising the retirement age to 67 could completely close large contribution gaps".

In France, however, the recent French lorry drivers' blockade was settled not by raising the retirement age to 67 but by lowering it to 55. The French are under social pressures that are causing them to move in the opposite direction from that suggested by the IMF and every sensible economist in the world.

I have made some back-of-an-envelope calculations on what unfunded pension liabilities might mean in pounds. Countries such as France, Germany and Italy might face liabilities in excess of 100 per cent. of their gross domestic product and the total liability in Europe could be as high as £10,000 billion. That is an enormous liability to contemplate. The fact that it is not shown in any of the accounts that have been drawn up for the next two years in order to decide whether countries meet the Maastricht criteria represents one of the biggest fudges ever concerning the single currency. It is horrendous to contemplate such a large item being left out of national accounts and nobody having a sensible debate on it other than in the United Kingdom Parliament.

What does the liability represent? It represents past politicians' promises and weaknesses in countries such as France, Germany and Italy during the 1960s, 1970s and to a certain extent the 1980s. It would appear that even in 1996 France is still making decisions and giving people benefits that will not have to be paid for a few years, but when they are, someone will have to meet the cheque. Many hon. Members' concern is that Britain could end up meeting that cheque despite what the Maastricht treaty says. I shall return to that.

It is worrying that, having established how serious the liabilities are, the European Commission does not seem to want to get to grips with them and there appears never to have been a discussion about their impact either at the Economic and Finance Council or in the European Council. In my view, it should be taken up not only by Finance Ministers throughout Europe, but by Prime Ministers and leaders throughout Europe.

The pension position will have an enormous effect on the international competitiveness of Europe. Throughout the 1980s, we in the United Kingdom had the highest proportion of pensioners of the major economies in Europe. We had to pay for those pensioners through raising higher taxes than we might otherwise have raised on British industry, business and individuals. In the next couple of years, France will have a higher proportion of pensioners than we have and, in the next decade, Germany will have a higher proportion. Because of those countries' pay-as-you-go schemes for pensioners and because they have no substantive pension funds, they will have to raise extra taxes from industry or business or individuals to meet that pensions liability or will have to undergo enormous social change that, so far, they have shown they do not want to undergo. The consequence will be that, in the next 10 years, British industry and business will have

a unique competitive position in relation to pension liabilities compared with France, Germany and Italy. We should not do anything to damage the opportunities that will result from that competitive position.

Article 104—the so-called no-bail-out clause—is, as was mentioned earlier, relevant and important. Article 104b states:

"A Member State shall not be liable for or assume the commitments of central governments, regional, local or other public authorities, other bodies governed by public law or public undertakings of another Member State, without prejudice to mutual financial guarantees for the joint execution of a specific project."

In other words, there is a let-out in article 104b, because a member state has only to come up with a specific project, such as dealing with member states' unfunded pension liabilities, and immediately article 104b would not apply. The Europeans have already got a let-out which could mean that if we joined a single currency, we might have to meet their pension liabilities.

It is also inconceivable that even if article 104b were watertight—even if the no-bail-out clause were absolutely copper-bottomed—it would be applied in practice. If Germany or France or Italy started to get into severe financial difficulties as a result of past pension commitments, it is inconceivable that the European Commission would not organise some bail-out. That is like saying that Washington would not organise a bail-out of California, if California were in enormous difficulties. We cannot suddenly say to Germany, France or Italy, "Sorry you are in difficulties, but although you are a member state of the European Union we are going to have nothing to do with you." We would have to get involved. We would have no choice but to get involved whether we were inside a single currency or outside and that is the danger that we must face. Those countries will have enormous problems as their pension liabilities come due for payment in the next decade and we, in some way, will find ourselves involved in trying to sort it out.

In conclusion, I emphasise that the figures involved are very large. The liabilities are real. They may not exist today, although we have already seen the strains in the French social security system that have resulted in strikes and demonstrations on the streets in France.

Mr. Rowe: My hon. Friend is a member of the Select Committee on Social Security and he is right to point out the fact that nowhere else in Europe appears to take the matter seriously. Will he consider consulting his colleagues on the Select Committee about whether it would be possible for it to host some kind of European seminar at a level that would have an impact on the entire debate?

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend is correct. That would be sensible and we have discussed it in the Select Committee. We would like to invite people from member states' Parliaments to London, because we think we have a unique piece of research. We have the benefit of the City of London and an increasing number of people in the country are aware of the subject. We wish to contemplate running a seminar and my hon. Friend has raised an interesting point.

The liabilities are real money liabilities and they will have to be paid in real cash amounts to pensioners in Germany, France, Italy and other countries in the European Union in due course. That time is not far away. Within the next decade, the liabilities will start to build up and, by about 2010, France, Germany and Italy will be paying out a much higher level of pensions each year than they pay out currently. We do not want to become involved in meeting that liability. We have good pension funds, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) pointed out earlier. We have a solid pension base with around the same total that everyone else in Europe put together has. We have some £600 billion of pension funds to protect our pensioners. Some of those pension funds are invested abroad, and some are even invested in the far east, so in many cases we will have the benefit of the young workers of the far east paying our pensions in the next 50 years. The aging populations of Germany, France and Italy, however, will not have pension funds invested elsewhere in the world. We are in a strong position and fortunately will not have to make the painful decisions that those countries will have to make. They have those painful decisions ahead of them, but they are not even having a debate about how they will meet those liabilities.

10.15 am

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): In a way, the only surprising aspect of the Select Committee's report, which caused a considerable stooshie, is that it has come late to the subject. The hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) remarked in his speech that he raised the matter in 1991 and my noble friend Lord Taverne was the rapporteur for the Federal Trust on a pamphlet entitled "The Pension Time Bomb in Europe" two years ago. So this is not a new issue. It is also true, despite the rather harsh approach of the hon. Member for Dover, that the Governments in Germany, Italy and France are endeavouring, albeit slowly, to address the problem and have been for some years. I start on that basis.

The connection between the Select Committee's report and economic and monetary union hit the headlines with the suggestion that somehow we would end up paying for the lot, which was underlined by the hon. Member for Dover. The Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), was his normal patient and cautious self—not great characteristics of the hon. Member for Dover. I have no pretensions whatever to being a expert in the complex world of pensions and I am far too prudent to contemplate crossing swords with the Chairman of the Select Committee, because that would be foolish of me. I admire what he does and I read, in so far as I am able to understand them, the articles that he writes. I endeavour to do my best. All I can do is to call witnesses.

Fortunately—or perhaps unfortunately, but certainly usefully—there was a debate on this issue on 20 November in the other place. It was introduced by my noble friend Lord Taverne and it was an interesting debate. I am sure that hon. Members have read the report. Contributions were made, for example, by Lord Taverne himself, of course; by Lord Ezra, the former chairman of the National Coal Board; by Lord Barnett, the former Labour Treasury Minister; by Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale, who was a distinguished diplomat in her time and also a foreign affairs adviser to the late John Smith; and by the Government Minister, Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish. All said the same thing and rested their case on article 104b of the Maastricht treaty.

[Sir Russell Johnston]

The hon. Member for Dover put a good argument when he said that if California were going bust, it could not be ignored in Washington. I take that point, but there is a difference to draw. I shall not keep the House long, but I want to approach the issue in two ways.

The European Commission has been referred to at length. It so happens that I have in my hand, hot from the press, a press release issued by the Commission this morning. It is not particularly long and the Commission clearly intended to make a contribution to the debate, so hon. Members may be interested to hear what it says. It refers to the claim in the Select Committee report

"that UK taxpayers could face increased bills to meet the pension fund liabilities of other EU member states. This was a serious misrepresentation of the intentions of the European Union."

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Most of us, if not all of us, have not seen the press release. Does the hon. Gentleman have a special hotline to the European Commission?

Sir Russell Johnston: Would that I had. A kindly person brought the press release to me in an envelope while I was sitting innocently here minding my own business.

The press release continues:

"It is written in the Treaty on European Union (Article 104b) that Member States will not be responsible for each other's liabilities in EMU. There will be no common fiscal policy, so the UK could not be called upon, under a single currency, to pay for the possible profligacy of any other country."

Mr. David Shaw: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Sir Russell Johnston: If the hon. Gentleman does not mind, it would be easier if I finished quoting the press release. It is not very long. I will certainly give way after that. It continues:

"Nor is there any possibility of this issue having an effect on interest rates. If a Member State borrowed heavily to fund its pension liabilities, thereby forcing a rise in European interest rates, it could be faced with heavy fines."

That refers to the stability pact. It continues:

"This is because all Member States which participate in Stage III of EMU will be required to keep their public sector deficits at less than 3 per cent. of GDP. This will put a clear limit on the total amount of borrowing permissible by governments. It is this commitment to avoid excessive deficits which will be underpinned by the Stability Pact to be further discussed in Dublin. The Pact is intended to act as a form of mutual self-discipline backed by heavy fines. European governments are increasingly aware of the future problems they may face unless pension funding arrangements are addressed. That is why, regardless of the Maastricht Treaty and the moves towards EMU, many European governments have embarked on strenuous efforts to overhaul their public finances."

Mr. Shaw: Does the hon. Gentleman concede that, as a minimum, the issue puts into question the ability of Governments to come within their annual deficit requirement of 3 per cent. under the Maastricht criteria? Does he also accept that paragraph 1 of article 104b ends with the words:

"without prejudice to mutual financial guarantees for the joint execution of a specific project"?

A specific project could be to share out Europe's pension liabilities.

Sir Russell Johnston: It is difficult for me to interpret the phrase, "a specific project", but I should have thought that pensions were more than a specific project; it is a massive area of policy. The words, "a specific project" suggest something of manageable size rather than the enormous problem that we are facing.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside) *rose—*

Sir Russell Johnston: Before I give way to the hon. Gentleman, I should like to add that we all know that we are talking not about present debt but about projected debt if we are operating on the basis of pay-as-you-go. Unless the Germans, the Italians and the French reform their systems in the meantime, 10 years hence they will be faced with an unbearable amount of money to pay. The hon. Member for Dover and the Chairman of the Select Committee have properly asked whether the Governments of those countries have the guts and the political determination to take such action in the face of undoubted unrest. There is nothing extraordinary about people protesting if their benefits are cut. I hope that the Governments will take action, but there is no certainty about it. So far as I can tell from all the evidence, including that from the Commission, the fear expressed by the Select Committee is not accepted by the European Union.

Mr. Walker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his usual courtesy in giving way. Does he accept that the article that has been referred to is a fact of life? It exists and has been agreed. The hon. Gentleman is proposing something that has not yet been agreed in defence of his position. We can address only the known—not hopes and aspirations, but reality.

Sir Russell Johnston: In European matters, it is always difficult to separate the reality from the aspiration in the simple way that the hon. Gentleman has just done. There is always an element of aspiration. The social chapter, about which some hon. Members get so furious, is composed largely of aspiration rather than reality. However, I must not lead myself away in that direction.

There is nothing further that I wish to say. What I had intended to say in conclusion I have already said in response to the hon. Member for Dover. There is a very big and real problem. It can be solved, but it will be hard. People are entitled to question whether the necessary political rigour exists. The problem is certainly fully recognised. As we know, considerable efforts are already in train in Germany and, notably, in Italy.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South–West): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way because I know that he is about to conclude. I should like to ask him about political will, set against what is currently asserted perhaps by some public relations person at the Commission. A huge row is going on between France and Germany on the extent of the rigour to apply on the convergence criteria and the pact. The French want a political approach with majority voting in the bank, while the Germans want a mechanical approach that would be totally impartial and utterly ruthless. They are falling out

over that central issue. How can a press release from the Commission make any assertion in those circumstances? I suspect that we are being expected to base an argument on the word of a junior official. This House, more than any other institution in Europe, should not depend on such arguments.

Sir Russell Johnston: If I attempted to answer all the issues raised by the hon. Gentleman, I should delay the House far too long. I shall say only that to describe the on-going discussion between France and Germany, which progressed the other day in Nuremberg, as a "huge row" is typical of the way in which our European debates are conducted. With respect to the hon. Gentleman, I am aware that others want in and I will terminate.

10.28 am

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): One of the great values of parliamentary debate is that it provides us with a wonderful opportunity to expose nonsense for what it is. In that spirit, I greatly welcome this morning's debate.

As the prospects of monetary union and of our being a part of it advance, it is only natural, given the strong emotions that exist on the subject, that its opponents should clutch at ever weaker straws. We have today a very weak straw indeed. I do not in any way resile from, or apologise for, the comments that I have made on the Select Committee report, which I have seen. I hope that, by the time I have sat down, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and other colleagues will understand why I held it to be entirely justified to make those remarks.

It is true that the level of unfunded pension liabilities on the continent—except in Holland—is higher than the level of unfunded pension liabilities in this country in the national insurance scheme and in public sector superannuation schemes. That is perfectly true—there is no question about that. I am happy to acknowledge also that nothing could be more disastrous than any suggestion that anybody should borrow now to pay pensions. On the whole, the pension debate in this country and on the continent has proceeded on the basis of a potential choice between funding pension liabilities and pay-as-you-go schemes. The idea that one might borrow to pay current pensions introduces an entirely third model—one that is horrific in its financial irresponsibility.

The third option is not to fund nor to pay as you go, but to disfund—to accumulate continuing financial liabilities to meet current pensions so that one places a bigger burden on future generations to pay back the money that one is paying out in pensions now plus interest, plus future pensions. Clearly, that is a horrific scenario. The only thing is that no one has ever suggested it, for precisely the reasons that I have set out. This is a windmill at which some colleagues are choosing to tilt in the best Cervantean tradition—it is an enemy that does not exist. The windmill might look like a fearsome animal advancing on us, but it does not exist. It is a figment of the imagination of some colleagues in the House.

Mr. David Shaw: Surely the report from the IMF, which has been prepared by IMF staff, is not a figment of anyone's imagination. There have been numerous reports, including reports from the OECD and that on the Dutch pension fund. A lot of people outside accept that this is not "nonsense", as my hon. Friend puts it, but a real situation that we must face. All three major parties in the House seem to accept that, and it is only my hon. Friend who seems to disagree.

Mr. Davies: I am sorry to have to inflict this on the House, but I must briefly recapitulate what I have said. There are two perfectly responsible and classic methods of approaching the payment of pensions. One is the pay-as-you-go system, the other is funding—or placing certain amounts of money aside from current income and investing those moneys in assets that are expected to yield a future return in the hope that that future return will meet pensions when they need to be paid. That is perfectly clear, and the argument in this country ever since Lloyd George at the beginning of the century, and on the continent since Bismarck, has been between those two systems.

What has been suggested this morning is that there might be a third system, under which we do neither of those things but simply borrow money and accumulate debt when we need to pay pensions. That is not saving for future pension liabilities—it is dissaving—and there is no question but that it would have horrific economic consequences. However, it is such a mad idea that no one has seriously suggested it. Nor do I believe for a moment that anyone would, or needs to, suggest it.

Another element of unreality in the picture that has been painted this morning is that, although it is true that there have been, and remain, substantial unfunded pension liabilities on the continent, that has in fact been the case for many years. It has been the case in all of the countries of the present EU since 1945 and, in many of them, for longer. It is also true that, for a long time, very little was done to match actuarially the potential liabilities of the pension schemes on the continent to the power of the economy to generate the resources to do so. If we had had this debate 10 years ago, it would have been a good deal more pertinent than having it today.

I have listened in vain for any speaker this morning to mention that the past few years have been characterised by the unfunded pension liabilities on the continent being reduced by a reduction in the benefit system. Germany has increased the pensionable age from 65 to 67, but no one has mentioned that. Anyone who knows the first thing about pensions knows that increasing the retirement age by two years has an enormous actuarial effect on the solvency of the scheme. It is odd that that salient fact has not come up. No one has mentioned that, in the past few months, Belgium has followed suit. It is also odd, and perhaps significant, that this has not come up in the debate this morning. No one has mentioned that Italy, after—naturally and understandably—tremendous political controversy for several years, has completely got rid of the scala mobile, the indexation of Italian pensions. Again, no one who knows the first thing about pensions would dispute for a second that removing indexation has an enormous and positive effect on the actuarial solvency of any scheme. It is funny that that salient fact has never come up either.

Paris is not far away and, when Eurostar is working—I believe that it is again—colleagues can go there in less than three hours. I am going there tonight, although not unfortunately by Eurostar. Does the House know what our colleagues in the Assemblée Nationale have been

[Mr. Davies]

discussing in the past few months? Has anyone in the Chamber bothered to find out? They have been introducing a funded pension scheme in France. It is odd that we are talking about this subject, but that that fact has not been mentioned. Of course, that scheme will help meet only future liabilities, but the point is that we are getting ourselves steamed up into great excitement, despondency and alarm and we are trying to generate a great sense of panic that this appalling thing, monetary union, will come upon us and destroy human life as we know it on the planet and that one of the effects that it will have is that no one will be able to meet their pension liabilities, but without actually confronting the facts before us.

We fail to notice that, in so far as there has been a problem with unfunded liabilities on the continent, it has existed for a long time. It is curious that no one in the Chamber thought to mention that this morning. The last few years have been characterised by a systematic, effective and—I think—courageous attempt on the part of our continental neighbours to address the problem. No one who has taken part in this debate has wanted to give them credit for that.

Mr. Frank Field *rose—*

Mr. Davies: Perhaps the hon. Member for Birkenhead, having been prompted by me, will now do so.

Mr. Field: One hopes that a large number of people will be watching this debate elsewhere. In looking at the nature of the speeches from hon. Members of all parties, they will have noticed that the only person who has got steamed up about anything has been the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies). The longer he goes on, the more he will be convincing people outside that there is a large problem—even if people are rather late in the day in coming to it. Some of them, who may have a little expertise, will know that the plans to which the hon. Gentleman has referred are merely proposals and have yet to be passed by the countries' Parliaments.

Mr. Davies: I am reassured and even more confident in the line that I have been taking in the debate by the fact that the hon. Gentleman, to whom I was delighted to give way, chose to make disparaging remarks about my style, and did not in any way challenge the substance of what I have been saying.

There is a further element of unreality about the debate. We have heard this morning from my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), who is an hon. Friend in every sense of the term. He is a very old friend of mine, and I am pleased to be sitting beside him this morning. He quoted article 104b of the Maastricht treaty, which I shall quote again. It says:

"The Community shall not be liable for or assume the commitments of central governments, regional, local or other public authorities, other bodies governed by public law, or public undertakings of any Member State, without prejudice to mutual financial guarantees for the joint execution of a specific project. A Member State shall not be liable for or assume the commitments of central governments, regional, local or other public authorities, other bodies governed by public law or public undertakings of another Member State, without prejudice to mutual financial guarantees for the joint execution of a specific project."

Even if anyone had ever suggested—which absolutely nobody has—that either the Union or any individual member state should be responsible for another member state's pension liabilities, that possibility would be excluded by the article. My hon. Friend the Member for Dover said that there was a let-out in the reference to

"the joint execution of a specific project"

but he cannot be that naive; he has been in business for many years and knows about such things. The fact is that the reference is to infrastructural projects for which individual member states have given specific guarantees; for example, if a bridge were to be built across the Rhine, public sector authorities on either side might agree to guarantee the financing.

When article 104b was drafted, it had to take account of the fact that member states would clearly be liable for specific guarantees that they had given for specific projects but, quite apart from the fact that pensions are not a project, it is absolutely clear that no such guarantees have ever been, or ever could be, given for other member states' pension liabilities. To suggest otherwise was a piece of special pleading that went rather further than the normal parliamentary licence that we allow ourselves when highly controversial matters are under discussion.

A further element of unreality in the debate was the suggestion that the convergence criteria in the Maastricht treaty are somehow wanting because they do not encompass the pension liabilities that exist in various member states. Evidently, I must take two minutes of the House's time to explain to certain hon. Members why the fiscal convergence criteria are included as criteria for monetary union.

If a member state were to default on its financial liabilities—if, for example the British Government defaulted on a gilt issue or the German Government on a Bund issue—that would clearly trigger a systemic financial crisis, because many investors, both private and, more especially, institutional, such as banks and insurance companies, hold that debt. If the debt had to be written off, those institutions would have to write off a portion of their capital and that would greatly reduce demand in the economy as a whole, producing a recessionary crisis. That is what is known as a systemic financial crisis.

A default by the various pension funds on the continent of Europe would not trigger a systemic financial crisis, because they have not issued any such debt. Nobody outside this wonderful House of Commons of ours has ever dreamt up the possibility of going down the road of pension schemes paying out their pensions by raising current debt in the markets. There is therefore no reason to protect ourselves from such an eventuality in the criteria for monetary union.

What would those pension funds do if they could not pay their pensions? They have two choices. *[Interruption.]* I can see that the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) does not like being told all these things. I am well aware of her strong emotions on the subject and that she thought that she had found a wonderful way of torpedoing monetary union, but I have to tell her that it will not work.

Miss Hoey: Look at the time.

Mr. Davies: I am afraid that I have every intention of finishing my speech.

Pension funds that could not meet their liabilities could either increase their contributions or cut their benefits. In the past few years, they have chosen the sensible way of substantially cutting their benefits. If there is any problem, it is less of a problem than it was a few years ago when, curiously, we heard nothing from the Euro-sceptics on the matter.

I cannot sit down without raising the most fundamental point about pensions, which was not raised either in our debate this morning or in the Select Committee's report: any pensions scheme, whether funded or not, involves a wager on the future. If one funds a pensions scheme, one accumulates financial assets or claims, equities, bonds and so forth. If the issuers of those bonds or the firms in which one holds an interest through the equity do not perform and generate a return and cannot service their debt or pay dividends, it does not matter how much the scheme is funded or what the actuarial surplus is, because the real resources will not be there in the future to meet the expectations of the pensioners.

Both pay-as-you-go and funding involve a wager on the future. The only reason known to economics for preferring funding is, so the theory goes, that it will involve an increase in the savings ratio, because of the money that is set aside from current income against future liabilities, and that that will provide the possibility for greater investment, which will enhance the economy's capacity to generate more resources, so output and the wherewithal to meet the real resource claims of pensioners will be increased.

That is a fine argument, and I happen to accept it, but it is based on certain assumptions about the return on investment and the efficiency of markets. Most importantly, it is based on the assumption that the compulsory savings levied from the population in enforced pension contributions—which I believe are a good idea—will involve an additional savings effort out of current income and will not simply displace savings that would otherwise have been made elsewhere. If savings are simply displaced, there will be no increase in the aggregate savings ratio as a result of funding pensions.

All the countries that we have been talking about—most notably, France, Germany, Belgium and Italy—have much higher savings ratios than we do at present, even though they have a lesser element of funding in their pensions. Therefore, considering the real economic backing for future pensions, one could legitimately draw the conclusion that the unfunded pensioners in those countries are better assured of getting a real return from their pensions than the funded pensioners in this country, where the savings ratio is, sadly, a great deal less.

I am sorry, and quite surprised, to have had to remind the House of a few elementary economic principles. I had to do so not because I am sure that hon. Members are genuinely ignorant of such matters or have set out in bad faith to exclude material facts and arguments from their presentation of the case this morning—I would never accuse any colleague of doing that—but because of the strong emotions, which I respect and entirely sympathise with, that are generated by the prospects of monetary union and those, I fear, have the capacity to distort the judgment of even the most intelligent, well-informed and well-intentioned people.

10.48 am

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): There is insufficient time to respond in detail to the arguments that have been made, so I shall make only a few brief points. My hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Security, said that there had been a number of misconceptions about his report, but the debate has made it clear that many issues are involved.

The debate is in part about United Kingdom pensions policy, in part about European pensions policy, in part about monetary union, in part about the alleged conspiracy of perfidious foreigners to steal our pension funds, tax our citizens and do numerous other unspeakable things in the name of the European Union, and in part about funded and unfunded schemes.

It would be wrong to draw the conclusion from the report that the United Kingdom is in a strong position overall on pensions. It is true that our unfunded liabilities for pay-as-you-go pensions are less and that that gives us advantages. It is equally clear that our citizens cannot, in general, look forward to high standards of pensions, and not necessarily to standards comparable with those of other European countries. In cutting the state pay-as-you-go element, the Government have failed to ensure that people can build up adequate funded schemes.

The hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) was right to say that all pension schemes are pay-as-you-go at the moment of delivery, whether the payments are made from funded schemes or from taxation. In the United Kingdom, the cost of future pensions will be reduced by the simple expedient of giving people inadequate pensions, and not through any other means. I and my party advocate moving towards funded pensions.

Paragraph 12 of the Social Security Select Committee report suggests that changing demographic structures will require

"a substantial increase in national resources devoted to the pension system, unless further cuts were made in pension benefit levels and entitlement."

However, that applies to a funded system equally as well as to an unfunded one. An aging population means that a funded system must enable people to have a greater call on the resources of a future society. It would be a mistake to believe that we have resolved that problem.

The European elements of the report are important. The crux of the Select Committee's argument is that, in some way, the British taxpayer will end up paying for unfunded pension liabilities. It is clear that many European countries will have to make some adjustment because of demographic changes. Countries may have to raise taxes and contributions, cut benefits and raise retirement ages; they may have to introduce, over time, new elements into the funding of their schemes; they may have to use a combination of all those measures. Many hon. Members have contended that none of those options is possible, that it is impossible for our partner countries in the European Union to adjust to demographic changes, and that the UK will inevitably end up bearing the consequences. I do not share the Select Committee's pessimism.

[Mr. John Denham]

First, I am not convinced that adjustment to change is impossible in other European countries. It is undoubtedly difficult, but I do not believe that it is impossible. The level of sustainable payments into pension systems varies enormously in Europe, according to different histories, political choices and cultural patterns. Levels of contribution that seem unsustainable to us have historically been sustained for many years in other European countries without great difficulty. Adjustment to change, although by no means easy, is not impossible.

Secondly, I am not convinced that there are not safeguards in the Maastricht treaty and in the current economic and monetary union negotiations, especially the stability pact, to prevent the burden of an unwillingness to change in Europe being passed to the United Kingdom. Thirdly, it is a bit rich for some representatives of such a fiscally imprudent Government, who have doubled public debt in the six years since the Prime Minister came into office, to lecture other European countries on their alleged fiscal imprudence. That does not sit well with the factual record of the past six years.

Finally, and this point is recognised in the Select Committee report, although buried in it, there is the mistaken assumption that isolation from monetary union isolates us from the consequences of integrated monetary markets in Europe and of the actions of other European countries. That is an illusion. It is the integration of markets that may bring across knock-on effects, not the monetary union process itself.

This debate has been an hors d'oeuvre to the two-day debate that starts this afternoon. The Select Committee has done us a favour in raising the issue but, as hon. Members will have gathered, I do not entirely share the pessimism of its conclusions.

10.53 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Oliver Heald): The Select Committee's report is more than an appetiser; it is an important contribution to the debate about unfunded pension liabilities in the European Union. We have had a good debate, which was opened with his customary panache by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). There were thought-provoking speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies), and excellent interventions from my hon. Friends the Members for North Tayside (Mr. Walker), for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), and for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher). The hon. Members for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) and for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) also spoke.

The issue of huge and increasing pension liabilities, especially unfunded or pay-as-you-go liabilities, is serious. In the 1940s, when the retirement age for men in Britain was fixed at 65, life expectancy for men was 63; today it is 74 and set to rise to 78 by 2030. The population over state pension age is set to rise from 10 million to 14 million in 2030. Those changes are mirrored, to a greater or lesser extent, across Europe.

In 1979, the Government had to consider the long-term sustainability of the British system and decided to develop a strategy which was affordable, yet met the expectations of people in retirement. The key to that has been encouraging individuals to make greater provision for themselves by introducing greater flexibility and choice for those choosing a pension. We allowed people to contract out of the state earnings-related pension scheme in different ways. We introduced personal pensions and have made a series of changes in the Pensions Act 1995. The effect has been that two thirds of employees have opted out of SERPS; more than 20 million people have rights in occupational schemes and more than 5 million hold appropriate personal pensions.

We also took steps, as has been mentioned, to make pensions more affordable. Taken together, those steps have defused the effect of the demographic time bomb in Britain. The result is that we have £600 billion invested in private pension funds on behalf of present and future British pensioners. That is not only more than in any other European Union country but more than in all the other member states put together. That means that we can face the future without imposing a huge tax burden on our economy and that our economy is strengthened by an immense injection of savings and more investment. That point was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover, estimated that the net present value of the liabilities of unfunded pension schemes in France is 98 per cent. of GDP; 113 per cent. in Italy; and 139 per cent. in Germany. In Britain, it is only 19 per cent. My hon. Friend also mentioned the International Monetary Fund report, which suggests that countries such as Germany and France would either have to raise social security tax collections or reduce pension liabilities by about 3.5 per cent. of GDP a year—a huge task. We are better placed than our European partners. Although I acknowledge, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding said, that our European partners are beginning to heed our example and that several countries, such as France, Italy Portugal and Spain, are beginning to encourage private pensions to supplement pay-as-you-go, much more needs to be done.

There have been suggestions in this debate and elsewhere that in the event of our joining economic and monetary union, the UK might have to pay for other member states' pensions, directly or indirectly, through higher interest rates or higher inflation. There is no question of the Government agreeing to pay other countries' unfunded pensions. We have no intention of using the assets that we have so carefully built up over many years to bail out other countries that have been slower to recognise what will happen and take the necessary action. There will be no common pensions policy under this Government, but I cannot give the same assurance if, heaven forbid, the Labour party were to come to power. The Labour leader has said that he would go along with whatever was pressed by other member states to avoid ever being isolated in Europe. The Select Committee may be right to say that we would face such pressures. The importance of avoiding any extension of majority voting and of maintaining our veto is immense.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): It says here.

Mr. Heald: It does say that here, but the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to learn that I wrote it.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has said that we shall be bolstered in our determination to resist any pressures to help finance other countries' unfunded pensions liabilities by articles 104b and 104c of the Maastricht treaty. The no-bail-out clause and the excessive deficit rules will make a difference in helping us to deter members of a euro zone from funding pension liabilities through excessive borrowing. The real protection that Britain and its pension scheme members have for the future is a Government determined to stand up for British interests and ensure that what we have built is not destroyed by others. So member states across Europe which face the difficulties of crystallisation of pension liabilities will have to deal with them by raising taxes, raising contribution rates, reducing the value of pension entitlements or cutting other spending programmes.

I welcome the attention—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. We now move to the next debate.

World Trade and the Environment

[Relevant documents: The Fourth Report from the Environment Committee of Session 1995–96, on World Trade and the Environment (HC 149-I), and the Government's response thereto (Cm 3445).]

11 am

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am pleased to have the chance to debate briefly the report of the Environment Select Committee on world trade and the environment. It is appropriate that we should debate this subject this week because the conference on world trade is taking place in Singapore. I thank my colleagues on the Committee for all their work on the inquiry. I thank our specialist advisers, James Cameron and Steve Woolcock, the Clerks, who always worked extremely hard, and our specialist assistant, Caroline Hand, who gave us a great deal of help in marshalling the material for the report.

I shall briefly set the scene. Put perhaps rather crudely, there are two views about world trade. One is that the more trade there is and the fewer tariff restrictions exist, on the whole the world gets richer and, as it does so, gains the will and the resources to tackle environmental problems and issues. The alternative view is that the world has such acute environmental problems that if trade goes on expanding, it will make the situation worse and worse, and that environmentally the world is heading for disaster. Those are two crude exaggerations of the position and the truth lies somewhere in between. It was part of our inquiry to find out exactly where the truth lies in the balance between environmental and trade issues.

All good Select Committee reports are dependent to a large extent on the quality of the evidence submitted. I was delighted with the quality of the evidence that we received. To most of us who were aware of their campaigning roles, it was no surprise that the evidence from Oxfam, the World Wide Fund for Nature and Friends of the Earth put the environmental concerns very strongly. I was particularly grateful to the Brazilian ambassador and politicians in Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand for expressing their concerns. In this short debate, I do not want to set out the way in which they set out their concerns because they did it politely and courteously. I shall summarise crudely what they said and the point that is continually put by people in the less-developed world. I am not quoting them. I am giving the general view that comes from those countries.

Britain, Europe, Japan, the United States and the other developed countries have raided the world's carbon stores. They have burnt masses of coal, oil and natural gas. They are still wasting energy and releasing a great deal of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere which is contributing to global warming. They have polluted vast areas of coniferous forests with acid rain. They have felled most of the world's temperate hardwoods. They have expelled large amounts of chlorofluorocarbons into the atmosphere and dumped a great deal of horrendous waste into lakes, rivers and seas. They have hunted many animals such as wolves and wild boar into extinction in some countries. Partly as a result of all that, the developed countries now enjoy a high standard of living. Now those countries are trying, under the guise of environmental protection, to stop emerging nations catching up.

I oversimplify, but it is important in understanding issues about trade and the environment that we understand how strongly people in the developing world feel that we

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have wasted much of the world's inheritance. We may have achieved higher standards of living as a result of it, but we are now trying to stop them doing the very same things.

The World Trade Organisation conference in Singapore is firmly committed to cutting down the barriers to trade. A strong group of people is campaigning there to make sure that the conference is not diverted into any other areas. The developing countries in particular but others too are keen that it should concentrate on removing trade barriers and not on anything else. Other people rightly say that free trade is perfectly all right, but we must consider employment issues, including the employment of child labour, and issues of cruelty, particularly the trapping of animals for furs, and we must consider the economic balance of power between the developed and the underdeveloped countries. As we say in our report and as Oxfam, Friends of the Earth and other people are saying, world trade must take into account environmental issues.

Our report goes on to examine, rather uncomfortably, the fact that the WTO, through the general agreement on tariffs and trade, has developed into a pretty powerful organisation, but the environmental organisations that have been established within the world are much weaker and cannot have the same input into discussions. I shall not go into that in great detail, but we should like to see a more effective input of environmental issues into world trade mechanisms for taking policy forward and for resolving disputes.

The next issue considered in the report is sustainable development. We set out, mainly by illustrations, some of the difficult issues around how far it was a good idea for a country such as Bangladesh to produce large numbers of frogs' legs for the European and American market; how far prawns, shrimps and exotic vegetables could be grown in the third world and flown to Europe and the United States; and how far that trade made those countries richer or undermined their traditional farming methods.

The next issue that I wish to highlight is the relationship between the multilateral environmental agreements and trade. Such agreements include the Montreal protocol on phasing out entirely from the world the use of CFCs that damage the ozone layer. Of all the agreements worldwide, the Montreal protocol is probably working better than most, although many people suggest that there is still an illegal trade in CFCs and probably some manufacture in eastern Europe. I ask the Minister to comment on that.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild flora and fauna appears to have some good aims, but we have some reservations about how easily it is enforced. We were lucky enough to go out to Heathrow and see the convention being effectively enforced on behalf of the British Government. One or two holidaymakers were caught who had gone to exotic places in the world and brought back souvenirs, not understanding how much damage they were doing. I hope that we can do more to warn tourists before they go abroad. The way in which containers are shuttled around the world means that if we are to make CITES work, there will have to be more inspection and sampling of containers. The Basle convention on hazardous waste is a good convention. The developed countries should not dump their hazardous waste on less-developed countries, but there needs to be some refinement of the process. In particular, there are concerns about whether scrap metal should come within the convention and whether developing countries can buy scrap metal from developed countries.

If those three agreements are working reasonably well, we have to look at how to develop new ones. An issue that always causes me concern is domestically prohibited goods. If something cannot be sold in Britain, it is totally wrong that it can be exported. A long time ago, when I visited one of the drug companies, I was horrified to see that two lines of drugs were being produced—one for sale in Britain and the other for sale in other parts of the world where quality control was not quite so stringent. We have to have an agreement on goods that cannot be sold in this country being sold to other countries and the sooner that is covered by a proper convention, the better.

I turn now to the question of a forestry convention. All environmental groups are, rightly, concerned about the way in which the rain forests and especially the best woods within them are disappearing. As I pointed out earlier, our record on forest destruction is not good. Everyone has to do their part if we are to persuade others to look after their forests—to manage them instead of simply felling them. I want a new agreement on sustainable forestry and, again, the sooner the better.

We must make sure that the commitments relating to biodiversity that emerged from the Rio conference are made to work. There is a trade-off between biodiversity and intellectual property rights and it is important that we get that right. The issue must be developed further.

On the question of eco-labelling, some of the people the Committee met outside the United Kingdom and one or two of those who gave evidence in the United Kingdom argued vigorously that eco-labelling is really a tariff barrier in disguise and that the developed world is using eco-labelling of various sorts to keep third-world goods out. I am an enthusiastic supporter of eco-labelling—when they are purchasing a product, the general public should know whether it is environmentally appropriate.

I do understand, however, the feelings expressed by paper producers about the fact that the requirement for tissues—especially toilet tissues—under the present eco-labelling scheme involves the use of a considerable amount of recycled paper. In western Europe, it is relatively easy to obtain large amounts of newspaper and other material to recycle; however, paper producers in Canada, Brazil or other countries that specialise in paper manufacturing might not have access to such a large supply of paper for recycling. It is not environmentally beneficial for producers in those countries to have to buy up waste paper from Europe and elsewhere and transport it to their production plants, simply so as to meet eco-labelling requirements for a certain proportion of recycled material.

I am also concerned that some third-world countries might find that the cost of getting their products through the eco-labelling certification process will make it difficult for them to enter overseas markets. That is why it is important that the European eco-labelling system works so as to ensure that there is only one accreditation system covering the whole European market, instead of having different labels in every country.

In addition, the eco-labelling system should increasingly become a worldwide one. In Thailand, we learnt of discussions in progress on developing their own

eco-labelling system. Although I hope that that would be along the best environmental lines, some of those discussions revealed that the Thais knew that eco-labelling might have trade implications and offer them an opportunity to protect their own trade.

I do not wish to take too long, because I know that other hon. Members on the Select Committee want to speak. I am also pleased to see hon. Members who are not on the Select Committee here today. I ask the Government to give us an update on the conference in Singapore. I fear that environmental issues have sunk low on the agenda, but I hope that the Minister can reassure me that that position will improve.

I press Ministers on the question of accreditation in respect of forestry. In our report, we said that we thought that the Forest Stewardship Council was a good way forward. If we are to persuade other countries—especially underdeveloped countries and countries with tropical hardwoods—to sign up to the council, we have no excuse for not trying to comply ourselves. The reluctance of the Government and the Forestry Commission to get involved in the scheme disappointed me and I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us that the Government's attitude to involvement is now more positive. I realise that it is a non-governmental scheme and I recognise all the arguments that a governmental scheme would be better, but there is no such governmental scheme. It is clear that many of Britain's do-it-yourself shops will sign up to it, so it would be a pity if the Forestry Commission and British timber products were put at a disadvantage.

In addition, will the Minister tell us what the Government are doing about domestically prohibited goods; give us an update on the Montreal and Basle conventions and on CITES; and tell us what progress is being made on eco-labelling and on making sure that it is based on sound environmental principles and does not become an alternative to tariff barriers? Finally, will he give us an update on the Government's real commitment to ensure that we do not pump more CO_2 into the atmosphere? I know that the Government say that we are doing well, but it is important that the other developed countries make a considerable contribution as well.

I hope that we can have a constructive debate on this issue. I greatly enjoyed the inquiry and I shall listen to the debate this morning with considerable interest.

11.16 am

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): Like some of my colleagues—or, dare I suggest, all of them—I approached the inquiry by the Select Committee on the Environment with some preconceptions. First, I believed that trade is necessarily advantageous to all nations. History teaches us that a country goes through a period of prosperity when it is active in trade. The like applies to regions and, presumably, to the world as a whole. It follows that, if greater prosperity is to be generated, trade should be encouraged; and that nothing should be done to interfere with that, because that prosperity will trickle down from countries that generate wealth to poorer nations, just as, in individual countries, wealth trickles down from those who generate it to the poorest people.

Some Opposition Members have argued that wealth generation should be restricted because it benefits those who create it to a proportionately greater extent. That is now a rejected tenet, but antagonism to wealth creation still lurks within the Labour party. The fact is that the poor cannot be helped unless there are those who are able to give assistance. Of course, I do not deny that the state has a role in helping to protect the weakest members of society, but it is undeniable that the generation of wealth leads to improved prosperity for all.

It follows that, by the development of trade, the same can occur internationally: trade brings prosperity and wealth. Inevitably, that will not fall evenly, but the generation of international wealth will lead to a more prosperous world and help poorer countries. Much prosperity for some nations leads to benefit for all through demand for raw materials, the use of tourist facilities and, above all, industrial development. Those processes can be helped by encouraging the distribution of overseas aid, but it cannot be expected that such aid will be given at a level that would weaken the strong—that would be self-defeating. The development of world trade is, therefore, desirable in providing improving world living standards. It is also clear that living standards in less-developed countries improve dramatically with industrialisation, which is invariably trade related.

It is always comfortable to have one's prejudices confirmed and I believe that the Select Committee's inquiry confirmed the views that I have just expressed. Environmental considerations must remain important—indeed, of the essence of responsible development—even to the extent of sometimes shaping the form of world trade, but never preventing it, for to do so would be a breach of our responsibility to less-developed countries and to deny them opportunities to better the lives of their people.

My second concern—a nagging doubt—was that, in a complex commercial world where the negotiating position of less-developed countries, and companies based within them, was inevitably weaker than those of the developed world, opportunities for exploitation existed and were sometimes taken.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I am sorry that I cannot stay for the whole debate as I have a meeting with Ministers. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the issues that makes a difference in recognising whether environmental impact is sufficiently taken on board in trading regulations is the openness and availability of better researched information on environmental impact? A strand that ran throughout the investigation was the need for better environmental information on the range of projects, developments and movements taking place worldwide.

Mr. Thomason: The hon. Lady is right. There is clearly a lack of information in some less-developed countries, but that is an inevitable product of development advancement. Obviously, less-developed countries do not have the calibration equipment to measure properly air and water quality. It follows that testing mechanisms are not therefore available properly to compare the quality of their environment with that of the developed world. That, however, must be seen in perspective as part of the development process.

As I was saying, I was concerned about exploitation, by which I do not mean trying deliberately to trap a poorer country in that status indefinitely, for few in our present world would sustain such a position for long, but simply

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utilising weaker regulatory powers that must exist in such less-developed countries. That follows the points made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) about equipment for testing and proper research. Improvements in standards might be discouraged to improve profit margins.

I am glad to say that our inquiry has led me to conclude that my fears were almost entirely, but not quite completely, groundless. Fast development in a country that may have little regulatory provision is often haphazard, uncontrolled and damaging. Sometimes it is the product of deliberate exploitation but more often, I suspect, it simply arises from the need to provide opportunities for those who previously had little. It is as much a product of a nation's internal pressures as of pressures from outside. What seems to happen is that factories are constructed with little regard to the protection of water or air quality; transport infrastructure is disregarded, with all the environmental consequences that flow from that; and the prospect of factory sites becoming contaminated is not even weighed in the balance.

Development opportunities will give a community the chance to fill empty stomachs—the environment can wait when people are starving. It was apparent to us, however, that that stage does not last long. A less-developed nation's people will soon appreciate that the quality of their life is suffering. As they move towards relatively better prosperity and, above all, education, an interest in the environment develops. It is a slow process, but it happens. The pressures often are as much external as internal, which is why the production of the Select Committee's report and the work of many international organisations and of our own and many other Governments is essential if environmental responsibility is to be encouraged to grow.

I also thought that companies might seek to take advantage of less-developed nations. There is some evidence that that takes place, but British companies can be proud of their position. We found that they generally take an extremely responsible attitude to development of plant overseas. Naturally, they must comply with local law, subject to its capacity to be enforced, but when that local law is of a lower standard than ours, they usually do much more than that. We heard and saw evidence that British companies create plant of as high a standard as they would expect to be built in this country, and operate it at standards that compare with those in the United Kingdom and other parts of the developed world. New plant in the less-developed world is often built to the latest standards, which may even be in advance of plant being operated in the developed world.

We hear too often criticism of British companies as alleged exploiters. Although there may be occasional exceptions, all our evidence showed that this is simply not the case. We should be proud of the work that British-based companies are undertaking throughout the world.

It is clear that the Government must give a higher priority to international environmental issues. That is not a criticism of what has been undertaken to date but a statement of what must be the objective for the future. If our Government, who generally have an extremely good environmental record, do not seek to lead the world, others cannot follow. The negotiations in Singapore, as well as past and future international discussions on trade, are the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry. That Department must, however, reflect the policies of the Department of the Environment in pursuing environmental objectives. This is a case where the seamless robe of government must be seen to be operating without flaw.

We must remind our alleged partners in the European Union, the United States, developed countries within the Commonwealth and others that the development of good environmental practices is not a hindrance to trade but a benefit. Ultimately, the degeneration of the environment leads to decay, as sure as cancer spreads through a body. To create long-term prosperity and improve quality of life globally, we need good environmental conditions. Just as a healthy human body can develop better if it lives in clean conditions, so the world community will be able to flourish if it is in environmentally good form.

I do not seek to argue that we should over-regulate—perish the thought, for that could kill business. However, seeking to achieve reasonable environmental objectives throughout the world should be a fundamental aim of Government policy. I am glad that the Government broadly accept that position. I am concerned, however, that issues of employment law may divert attention from environmental aspects. Of course, certain aspects of employment law may be appropriate to be considered at international level, but the environment takes greater priority in the natural order of advancement of the less-developed countries and we should respect their agendas.

Nor should we forget that a deteriorating quality of life in one corner of our planet has a direct impact on ourselves. No country or continent can lock itself away from the rest of the world. What happens thousands of miles away affects the air that we breathe, the food that we eat and the oceans that lap our shores. The international environmental agenda must be ours; it is not just for someone else.

It has been a privilege to serve on the Environment Select Committee during this Parliament and, in particular, to be involved with the preparation of the report, which should be a significant contribution to developing the Government's position and continuing our nation's call for improved environmental standards without attacking the creation of wealth and the generation of new industry.

11.28 am

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): In recent years, the interaction between trade and environment protection has generated much debate but little consensus. Yet, in theory at least, the international community is committed to both trade liberalisation and environmentally sustainable development. In principle, the pursuit of both objectives might be entirely compatible. Trade allows countries to specialise in the production of goods and services in which they are most efficient, and to maximise the return from the given use of resources, which is a movement in the direction of environmental sustainability. Furthermore, trade liberalisation can encourage the spread of environmentally friendly technology.

However, trade can also—and arguably often does—harm the environment. The benefits of lower costs through lower environmental standards go to the

producer. The disbenefits of the environmental pollution that results fall on the entire community, and increasingly that means the global community. In other words, competitive trade can encourage producers to ignore the wider environmental costs of what they do, to maximise their own price competitiveness at the cost of everyone else.

A country that has accepted more stringent environmental controls may well find that it is undermined by competition from other countries with laxer standards and hence lower production costs. In practice, most of the evidence submitted to the Select Committee suggests that that has not happened. Higher environmental standards have been offset by the gains from greater efficiency. However, there is no doubt that Governments and industries have often resisted higher environmental standards for fear of losing competitiveness, or for fear of businesses relocating abroad to places demanding lower standards.

International market prices do not reflect the environmental costs of cutting down forests, polluting waterways, eroding soils and overfishing. We have international rules against selling products at less than they cost to produce, but environmental dumping may be rewarded in the global market economy.

To some people, such concerns still seem remote, but the environmental threats are real and, for many communities, so are the economic threats. My constituency is no exception. In the St. Austell area, for example, we have the largest site of opencast mining in Europe—not for coal, but for china clay. Thousands of clay jobs have been lost, partly through new technology and partly through increasing competition in recent years. In the clay area, there is understandably constant pressure for higher environmental standards to protect residents from dust, to protect traditional village communities from tipping coming too close and to protect what remains of the traditional landscape, flora and fauna.

Much has already been achieved in the area, to the credit of the county council and the clay companies, chiefly English China Clays, but the industry continues to warn that tougher standards could threaten its future and its competitiveness. The remaining 4,000 jobs in the industry in my community are under review again and more may be lost as new china clay deposits come on stream in Brazil. There, companies do not have to operate around existing villages—those can be swept away, if they exist at all—nor do they have to restore and revegetate the landscape after tipping waste on to it.

The fear in St. Austell is that the choice may be between protecting our environment but losing our jobs as the local industry becomes uncompetitive, and maintaining competitiveness, with the loss of our environment. I hope that it will not come to that, but in one of the poorest communities in Britain, the fear is real.

The conflict between the desire to protect the environment and the urge to increase trade will not go away. On the contrary, the combination of the growth in trade and the accumulating evidence of global environmental degradation seems likely to lead to more, and more serious, conflicts.

The World Trade Organisation committee on trade and the environment is an important first step to relieving those pressures, by incorporating environmental considerations into international trade policy, but the fear is that it is unbalanced in favour of trade. This week's WTO summit is the first opportunity to resolve those tensions. The purpose of our report was to influence the British and European position.

In response to our report, the Government said that they would accept many of the Committee's conclusions and recommendations, although they rejected some. There are times when I am not sure that the Select Committee went far enough. I urge the Government to reconsider their position on those issues.

My most serious concern relates to trade measures based on process and production methods. Recent general agreement on tariffs and trade panel decisions have differentiated between the environmental impact of products and the environmental impact of how they are produced—process and production methods. Countries are permitted to take trade measures—import bans, for example—against products that are harmful to the importing country's environment, so long as the same product is treated equally, whether it is produced by domestic or overseas producers. GATT panels, however, have ruled that such action is not permitted on the basis of process and production methods.

The logic of that decision is that process and production methods are highly country-specific. The same process may cause different environmental damage in different countries, depending on such factors as population density. Yet where the effects of pollution are international, such a differentiation is hard to justify. Carbon dioxide released in Asia, for example, causes just as much global warming as carbon dioxide emitted in Europe.

It is probably true that most of the serious pollution problems that we are facing arise from production processes, not the resulting products. An example is the use of energy in industry and agriculture. To combat such problems, important and effective multilateral agreements have been introduced on topics such as chlorofluorocarbons. When applied to world trade, however, such agreements are under constant threat of being undermined by current WTO rules.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that under the present WTO arrangements, a ban on fur from leg-hold traps, which Britain rightly imposed in 1954, would be considered an infringement of trade? Clearly, the product—fur—does no harm, but the way in which it was obtained was immensely painful to the animals.

Mr. Taylor: The same answer applies to global environmental issues as to animal rights and related issues. I shall briefly touch on that later, although the Select Committee came to the view that it was not immediate to our inquiries.

The hon. Gentleman's question demonstrates why it is vital that every opportunity is taken at Singapore to amend current WTO rules, so that we can discriminate against imported products on the basis of the way in which they are produced, through multilateral environmental agreements. Indeed, I would go further: where a threat is immediate and clear, such as the loss of an important species, we might need to allow unilateral action, under tightly specified circumstances. Nevertheless, global environmental problems are clearly best tackled through

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the negotiation of multilateral environmental agreements. International action is preferable to unilateral action, not least because it is more effective.

The issue becomes still more important in the context of the current negotiations on the framework convention on climate change, which are supposed to agree a control protocol by the end of next year. It is highly likely that such a protocol will contain trade measures, as they worked so well in the case of the Montreal protocol on ozone-depleting substances.

In that case, parties to the climate change protocol could be required to refuse to trade with non-signatories to the agreement, or at least to refuse to trade in products containing or made by processes that released such gases. As that could potentially include any product made with fossil fuels, it would provide a powerful incentive for countries to sign the climate change protocol.

If a climate change protocol contains measures allowing trade sanctions against non-signatories, it is essential that they do not become subject to challenge in the WTO, or the protocol is unlikely to be effective. It was fear of sanctions, not just growing environmental good will, that led so many to sign up to the Montreal protocol.

The hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) was correct to point out that animal welfare was a related issue. It is my view and that of the Committee that it should be given separate consideration by the WTO. I urge the Government to reconsider the decision not to accept that recommendation.

Many animal welfare issues entail processes—how an animal is caught, rather than what is caught. A presumption of compatibility must be firmly established between the WTO and multilateral agreements on animal welfare standards. At the same time, the topics of animal protection and welfare should be introduced into the remit of the WTO committee on trade and the environment, providing an international forum in which to discuss them further.

The WTO committee on trade and the environment is reporting to the ministerial conference this week. As I am sure the Minister is aware, the report contains almost no conclusions whatever—simply the statement that more work needs to be done. Discussions in the committee have been notably unconstructive, and it is questionable whether anything will be achieved in such a forum.

I believe that the underlying problem is that the committee is composed primarily of trade negotiators, rather than negotiators from environmental departments. The UK and the EC are among the few exceptions. As long as discussions on trade and the environment are carried out solely within a trade forum, it is unlikely that any conclusions favourable to the environment will be reached.

I hope that the Minister now accepts that a new trade round is needed, and that the environment should be one of the subjects of those negotiations. That would allow environmental protection measures to be discussed alongside trade liberalisation. That is likely to be the only way in which we can make progress, although Government support for the concept of an international panel of experts on trade and the environment, as proposed by the World Wide Fund for Nature, would be a positive step. I am disappointed that the Government have so far refused to take part, although other Governments have supported the proposal.

Even in the United Kingdom, environmental considerations are not always given the merit that they deserve. Let me reiterate the Select Committee's view that environmental policy objectives are not being taken fully into account in international negotiations. Trade negotiations this week are being led by the Department of Trade and Industry. The paper produced jointly by the DTI and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, dealing with free trade and foreign policy, makes only one mention of the environment, and the Government have clearly still not placed it among their priorities for Singapore. I hope that the Minister will assure us today that environmental considerations will be a priority for British Ministers this week, as neither what the Secretary of State for the Environment said when he appeared before the Committee nor the Government's response to its report was adequate in that regard.

Perhaps the greatest block to progress, however, is the understandable fear in the developing world that environmental pressure from the developed world is simply a back-door block to competition. That fear must be recognised, and Britain has a special part to play in the overcoming of it, in two ways. First, we must understand that we have built much of our present wealth by committing enormous environmental destruction in the past. If we are to expect the developing world to behave differently, we must use some of that wealth to provide the aid that will help it to develop, and use more environmentally sustainable alternative technology. We must also remember that the 20 per cent. of the world's population in the developed world currently use 80 per cent. of the world's resources. We must accept an equally disproportionate part in reversing that excessive destruction.

In a world that is increasingly threatened by environmental degradation, we desperately need new rules and institutions to govern international trade. The Government have a chance this week to take the lead; I believe that, with our European partners, we have a real opportunity to do so, but I fear that that opportunity may yet be missed. I urge the Government not to allow that to happen. I hope that, at the end of this week, we may be able to say that Europe, and Britain in particular, has genuinely played a part in the taking of the next step.

11.41 am

Sir Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): To cover the report on world trade and the environment, together with the Government's response, and to distil it and make it understandable, would demand the services of a contemporary author: John Grisham springs immediately to mind. I approach the subject not only under the Whip's stricture, but suffering from the main handicap—shortage of time. There is also the need to allow others to speak, and to make the subject interesting, compressing my speech into a reasonable time while also expressing my own views.

I pay tribute to the many witnesses who appeared before the Select Committee, and to the people in foreign countries who not only answered searching questions but gave their unsolicited opinions in such a pithy manner.

I thank all those involved in the Committee's deliberations, including the Chairman, whose views are well documented. He carried out his duty with his normal detached objectivity, and his rod of iron was replaced at times—not frequently enough—with a fleeting look of disapproval which was as effective, if not more so.

I also pay tribute, and express my gratitude, to my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason), who spent so much time on the detail of the Committee. I have admired his knowledge and the way in which he operates for a long time. He mentally kicks me under the table, as it were, to tell me, "This is the way in which we should be going, not the way in which you want to go."

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): The hon. Gentleman needs kicking.

Sir Irvine Patnick: The hon. Gentleman is a great artisan of kicking.

I have endeavoured to break my speech into various sections. How, for instance, can Governments create a competitive advantage? During the Committee's visit to Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia, we were informed that some of the actions taken by developed countries were unhelpful to their area. The comment that sticks in my memory concerned hardwoods. The people there asked, in no uncertain manner—the way in which they asked the question, and the expression on their faces, gave it even more weight—why, now that the United Kingdom and parts of Europe had used their hardwoods, we should stop them from changing their economy by cutting down their trees because, by our standards, it was unacceptable. That is a pertinent question.

The removal of subsidies and other protectionist measures detailed in the general agreement on tariffs and trade has an escape clause in article XX(b), which allows countries to opt out of its obligation—or, in a nutshell, provides an exception

"necessary to protect human, animal or plant life or health."

When GATT was created, environmental protection was not high on the "things to do" list; nor, indeed, were many countries giving it the consideration that it deserved. Thankfully, countries now do, and the United Kingdom's first-ever audit of the environment—"This Common Inheritance"—and its yearly updates have focused on that important subject. But GATT is not the catch-all that many would have us believe; rather, it is one lever of a wider machinery, including CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species—which regulates the wildlife trade—the Montreal protocol, which deals with substances that deplete the ozone layer, the Basle convention, which deals with the management of hazardous waste, and proposals from the European Community. All that information is now freely and readily available, so I need not spell it out in great detail.

Encouraging the spread of clean and efficient technology was one of the key issues during our visit to Singapore, where multinational companies operate to the highest European or United States standards—they do so wherever in the world the companies are situated. I was delighted to discover that. Know-how technology has also been exported, and, indeed, some British companies are developing models of co-operation that are attractive to developing companies overseas. Many of those countries constitute possible substantial markets both now and in the future.

What those countries need is a good education system which produces a good reservoir of talent—which, in turn, produces good backgrounds in science, mathematics and technology. Many developing countries are not advanced enough in their education and training to take on and develop full industries of their own, acting instead as assembly plants for foreign countries. I pay tribute to British Aerospace, Rolls-Royce, Ford and, indeed, the university of Sheffield, which are prepared to develop and support companies and help them to plan for education and research, providing the expertise that is required. Such work is a valuable export for the United Kingdom, and we are all the beneficiaries.

Economic growth can lead to increased pollution, which is a major concern. We heard from several witnesses about that. One of the things that we noticed on our overseas travels was the fact that some trades created environmental problems. Again, some British-based companies were out there dealing with the problems created by pollution, including British water companies.

In their response, the Government picked up the points that we had made about the removal of trade restrictions and its environmental impact. In 1999, the Government will attempt to address those points in the next round of the World Trade Organisation negotiations, and I welcome that.

Many factors impact on environmental protection, one of which is competitiveness. Many companies in Britain adopt voluntary measures to improve environmental protection. Eco-labelling and purchasing policies both help the environment. If I have discovered anything, it is that it is hard to find eco-labelling when one is out shopping. People are more concerned with price, availability, quality, service and usability than with eco-labelling, and that problem should be addressed. It can place foreign manufacturers at an economic crossroads, and put the environment at a disadvantage.

Countries that do not help to protect the environment can certainly produce cheaper goods, but at the expense of the environment, and they may help to create more eco-dumping and pollution havens. I know that that concerns the WTO and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, but I nevertheless agree with the Government and with principle 12 of the Rio declaration. I therefore urge the Government to continue to encourage industry to adopt good environmental management, and to participate in the EC eco-management and auditing scheme. I commend the Government for their clear commitment to that, as outlined in the third competition White Paper. I welcome the agreements on the vital role of the International Standard organisation.

Throughout the world, security and stability enable markets to function smoothly. As we discovered during our visits, supporting business is the largest single activity of our diplomatic posts abroad. I must pay tribute to the dedication, professionalism and commitment of the employees of British firms who were available to discuss their products at trade delegations. I was privileged to meet some of them at an exhibition in Malaysia. They are a credit not only to their companies but to this country, and we should be aware of their efforts on behalf of Britain's exports.

Many people draw attention to traffic congestion in the United Kingdom. They should see the traffic in Bangkok—if they want to see a gridlock, that is the place

[Sir Irvine Patnick]

to go. We had a police escort, but it did not help at all. Bangkok insists that it is capable of solving its traffic problems through road pricing and taxation, but I think that this is a case of, "Watch this space."

In an interview, I was once asked what was the most evocative smell that I remembered. I replied that it was that of a joiner's shop. It is possible to—or at least I was able to—differentiate between the smell of oak, pine and other timbers. Like the smell of newly cut grass, such smells stay with one.

In March this year, we visited a major DIY store—B and Q—in Wandsworth. I was impressed by the way in which the store had taken to sourcing its materials, especially timber. It outlined the aims of the Forest Stewardship Council, which sets standards for sustainability. The work done to encourage villagers in some countries to manage and log timber themselves was a most interesting aspect highlighted during our visit.

As ever, when I see timber toilet seats, I recollect being told that the shape of the toilet seat was determined by the shape of the bowler hat of the foreman in charge of the joiner's shop. That was before my time, but the story lingers that the hat determined the inner dimensions of the seat.

To continue my flashback, when I was a building contractor, we used to take out the old high-flush toilets, washbowls and cast-iron baths. On the occasions when we did not take out the bath—it was heavy—we used to panel it in and replace the brass taps with chrome ones. Sometimes we simply replaced the toilet seat with a plastic one and put hardboard flush on beautifully panelled doors. The construction industry has now gone full circle—wooden toilet seats are back, the old-style baths are now worth a fortune and brass taps are being fitted again. The final turn of the wheel means that it is possible to buy a plastic door panelling kit to attach to flush doors and make them look like panelled doors. As they say in the trade, we have seen it all before.

Many factors affect trade and the environment. Some people may disagree with me, but I believe that awareness of the environment is now a fact of life. That is to be welcomed and worked on, and I contend that the Environment Committee's report entitled "World Trade and the Environment", together with the Government's response to it, have moved the debate on. They are documents that future generations will turn to in years to come.

11.52 am

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): I found the speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick) most moving, especially his eloquent tribute to Thomas Crapper. I pay tribute to all that the hon. Gentleman did in his early days to cover up any reminder of what that honourable gentleman did.

If the hon. Gentleman thought that Bangkok's traffic was bad, we must have been in Bangkok last night when some idiot jammed his lorry in the Blackwall tunnel, causing hundreds of thousands of Londoners to be inconvenienced to such an extent that some spent three hours or more blocked in the tunnel. I should not like to think that we are going to bring that aspect of Bangkok over here.

The hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) is wrong—there is no antagonism to wealth creation on Labour Benches, certainly not under new Labour. However, we are opposed to wealth creation based on the gross exploitation of either human or animal resources. It would be crazy if we, as politicians, did not want individuals and communities to prosper, but we think that individuals, communities and countries will prosper that much better if they operate in a framework of concern for the environment. That, after all, is what the excellent report of the Select Committee on the Environment is all about. The hon. Gentleman's accusations do not bear critical examination.

I want to talk briefly about paragraph 170 of the Select Committee's report, the one part that deals with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. Before the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) left the Chamber to go to a meeting, he requested that I move into my restrained mode if I was going to talk about animals. He and I work closely on animal welfare issues, but he knows—I think that the whole House knows—that I find it very difficult to be restrained when talking about the exploitation of animal resources.

The gross exploitation of animal resources is appalling. Everywhere we look, we can find evidence of the gross inhumanity that human beings exhibit towards other creatures on the planet. I accept that much of it is done illegally, but much is still done in the pursuit of legal trade.

We have seen the Chinese keeping bears in appalling conditions and tapping bile from them because they think that it has medicinal properties. People stockpile rhino horn because they think that it is an aphrodisiac. In Yemen, rhino horn is used to create dagger handles, but it is also imported into this country. Customs and Excise recently seized a large number of rhino horns and I pay tribute to that work in trying to enforce CITES regulations. I know that many Conservatives feel as strongly as I do that the Government should give extra resources to Customs and Excise, to enable it better to enforce those regulations and stamp out the appalling trade in endangered species.

When the Minister replies, will he say a little more about the Government's response to the Select Committee's report in relation to illegal trade? Paragraph 20 of the Government's response states:

> "The Department of the Environment is holding a seminar in October 1996 to identify practical ways to improve enforcement efforts in the UK."

Regrettably, I did not hear much about that seminar, and it would be helpful if the Minister told us a little more about it.

A report appeared in *The Guardian* yesterday following the publication by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre of its red list. The list comprises animals that are now endangered. The research, based on an assessment of the 5,205 species and undertaken by a network of more than 500 scientists worldwide, revealed that 25 per cent. of mammals, 25 per cent. of reptiles, 25 per cent. of amphibians and 34 per cent. of fish are threatened with extinction. That should concern us all.

It is all very well talking about the rights of fishermen and arguing with partners inside and outside the European Union about fishing regulations, but if fishermen are

allowed to fish stocks to extinction, they are not only doing themselves out of a job, but destroying the ecology of the sea.

The hon. Member for Hallam mentioned the problem with hardwood in Thailand. The rain forests are of course under great pressure. Some less-developed countries are asking why they should not supply markets in northern Europe and north America with the hardwood that we need and why we should be restricting their ability to develop their economies.

We have to accept that argument, but we must acknowledge that rain forests belong to the planet as a whole. If the rain forests go, we go—it is as simple as that. It will be a long way down the road. It will not be us sitting in the Chamber. But eventually we shall drive ourselves to extinction by driving other species to extinction, because we are all interrelated.

Therefore, we should tell those countries that we shall put money and resources where our liberal consciences are. We should give them the resources to enable them to avoid over-exploiting resources that belong not just to them but to the planet. If they belong to the planet, all the countries on the planet must take responsibility for preserving those resources. We cannot expect single countries to do that on their own, particularly if they are in the less-developed part of the world economy.

Another problem which concerns a number of us and on which another report was issued last week is the booming trade threatening the world shark population. Sharks may not be the most attractive creatures in the minds of many of us, although to me they are a damned sight more attractive than the average Member of Parliament, but that is the way it goes.

Shark species are being exploited to such an extent that certain shark populations are reaching the edge of extinction. That is extraordinarily worrying and it should worry all of us. The trouble is that, in many cases, sharks are not listed as an endangered species and so are not protected. The trade is not regulated. It is appalling. For example, there is a big demand for shark fin soup. Hong Kong is one of the main areas where the demand flourishes, and it extends into China and throughout south-east Asia. One knows from evidence of shark fishing in Japan that the shark is taken out of the water, its fins are cut off and then it is thrown back into the sea. A shark has to keep swimming in order to live and without its fins it cannot and it dies a horrible, lingering death.

Such exploitation makes me extraordinarily angry, because it shows no concern for other life forms. It is at that point that I lose all sympathy with and sentiment for human beings. I may go a little further than most people, but I just hope that I am around when that asteroid crashes into the earth and wipes out all life forms, as happened 65 million years ago. I would like to raise my glass of champagne to the asteroid as it comes in. Nature will then be able to start again and come up with a species that is somewhat better than human beings at living in harmony with the other creatures on this planet. Unless we do that, we shall take many species to the point of extinction and beyond. That would be a calamity not just for those species but for all of us who are left. Every time one species is extinguished, we are all diminished by that act.

Unregulated trade, trade which has no concern for animal resources, is not the sort of trade that I, and I suspect other hon. Members, or Britain want. We want trade and prosperity, but it must be in sympathy with other life forms, particularly the animal life forms with which we are privileged to share the planet.

12.2 pm

Ms Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks), with his enormous enthusiasm for the threatened species of the planet.

The debate is welcomed by the Opposition. It is an issue that Labour has taken seriously for a considerable time.

Sir Irvine Patnick: New Labour.

Ms Ruddock: New Labour, old Labour, every Labour—we have always taken the issue seriously. Labour's trade and environment protection team published a joint paper two years ago, "Trade and the Environment", and Labour's policies were further developed in our environment document "In Trust for Tomorrow" and the more recent foreign policy document "A Fresh Start for Britain".

We have no doubt that trade and the environment are inextricably interlinked and that many developing nations have suffered severe environmental degradation as a result of inappropriate development and trade.

The Select Committee's report, on which I congratulate particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and all his colleagues, is complex and tackles the difficult issues with some clarity and depth. Labour agrees with much of the report. It has 24 recommendations and conclusions which I cannot possibly address in the short time available to me. However, it is particularly timely, as other hon. Members have said, because of the Singapore conference.

I refer first to the role of the United Kingdom Government. The Select Committee expressed concern that UK delegations are failing fully to reflect the Government's declared environmental policy objectives, and recommended that the Department of the Environment increase its input into international trading negotiations.

The failure fully to reflect and implement the UK's environmental policy is a problem not just encountered in international gatherings. It is a problem to which I have referred at the Dispatch Box on numerous occasions, and one to which I referred in our debate on sustainable development last week. The Government do not take the environment sufficiently seriously and have certainly not integrated it into all aspects of their policies.

I am glad to say that the Government's response to the Select Committee's report acknowledges that there is scope for improvement. But on the environment, as in areas of domestic policy, the Government find themselves facing both ways. The Department of Trade and Industry is wholly committed to free trade and we may assume that that has been its stance in Singapore but, specifically on page 27 of the document "Free Trade and Foreign Policy: a Global Vision", the Government say:

> "A liberalised trade policy and a high level of protection of the environment should be mutually supporting in contributing to sustainable development."

May I ask the Minister to say what precisely that means, particularly in the context of the World Trade Organisation conference? What input has the Department

[Ms Ruddock]

of the Environment had into the Singapore meeting? What environmental issues has the UK put on the agenda, and what progress is deemed to be being made in respect of sustainable development at that conference?

The Labour party supports the Select Committee's view that the relationship between multilateral environmental agreements and the rules of the general agreement on tariffs and trade must be clarified. What are the UK Government doing in Singapore to resolve that vital issue?

The Select Committee highlighted the European Commission's proposals to amend article XX of GATT to make it clear that trade measures within MEAs are allowable under GATT. In particular, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, with its concern for biodiversity, believes that that change is essential. The Government's response to the Select Committee's report shows that they are prepared to support that, but we ask the Minister today specifically to undertake that the UK Government will actively pursue that proposed change within the EU.

We were somewhat surprised by the Government's reluctance to support the international panel of experts that the World Wide Fund for Nature is trying to establish. That project is already supported by five Governments and the European Commission. Will the Minister tell the House today whether the Government, as the Select Committee recommends, are willing to discuss the matter further with the World Wide Fund for Nature? Labour endorses that and believes the proposal to be worth while.

I further endorse the request that has already been made to the Minister on the Forest Stewardship Council. Labour again supports the Select Committee's position and urges the Government to think again and to accept that that is the only scheme in existence at present which has support, so there is no excuse for the UK not to join in something that could have valuable international implications.

All hon. Members would agree that Britain is a trading nation. Our export performance is crucial to our overall economic success. We export a higher proportion of GDP than Japan, Germany or the United States. Britain's most important market is the EU, although one might not think so judging by the behaviour of half the Government. The single market is the world's largest economy, accounting for more than one third of global trade. As such, we have a major responsibility to ensure that we do not seek all the benefits of trade while foisting all the costs of environmental damage on developing nations.

We believe that trade can benefit the environment, both through economic growth and through encouraging the use of clean technology. It is vital that developing nations have access to modern clean technology so that the environmental destruction that is associated with past industrialisation in the north can be avoided. The interest of companies in patents to protect their investments in new technologies must be balanced by reasonable arrangements for developing countries to have access to technology transfer.

Labour is committed to a system of international trade that is open, fair and sustainable and thus raises the standards of developed and developing countries alike, but countries will open their economies to trade only if they can be assured of reciprocal action by others. That is why international trade must be based on agreement and be policed by a system of international regulation.

Labour welcomed the conclusion of the Uruguay round of the general agreement on tariffs and trade and the creation of the World Trade Organisation, but we believe that more reform is still necessary, in particular to ensure that the benefits of free trade are generated in a fair and sustainable way. Thus a Labour Government will seek to amend GATT to make it clear that signatories have a right to protect natural resources and that that should refer not only to resources within the jurisdiction of the acting state, but to the "global commons".

Labour will also extend free trade agreements to include services and intellectual property rights. We will ensure that international environmental agreements are made exempt from challenge under the World Trade Organisation, including the Montreal protocol, the Basle convention, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species and the biodiversity and climate conventions. We endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish said on forestry conventions.

It is crucial that Britain plays a leading part in international efforts to create a stable international macro-economy that supports trade, employment and international stability. We hope that progress might be made on those issues in Singapore, but, like other Members today, we feel that there is not much evidence of that happening.

The WTO is not the only international body that must deal with the vital issues of trade and the environment. The United Nations too must have an enhanced role in co-ordinating international economic, social and environment policy. Labour will press for a greater role for the UN Environment Programme and for the Commission on Sustainable Development in the promotion of sustainable economic policies among UN member states.

The issues of trade and the environment are inextricably linked with those of aid and development. The protection of the global environment cannot be postponed until developing countries grow rich. Nor can it be achieved by keeping developing countries poor. Clearly, aid has a critical role in bringing about sustainable development. Labour in government will urge other institutions, including the World bank, to lend increasingly to agriculture, particularly to small-scale farming, and to integrate environmental sustainability into all aspects of the bank's work. We will report regularly to Parliament on the work of the World bank and of the International Monetary Fund and on the UK's role.

Under Labour, aid programmes will be audited for environmental impact and underpinned by a commitment to environmental sustainability. In Europe, Labour will work for greater consistency between European Union aid, trade, agriculture and economic reform policies and improvements to EU aid development programmes in relation to the environment.

There is no doubt that internationally agreed standards should be a floor for environmental protection and not a ceiling, although states must remain free to adopt higher standards if their populations demand it or if their environments are particularly vulnerable.

This has been an excellent debate, for which we would all have wished for more time. There has been much agreement both with the report and with the sentiments that many of us have expressed from personal experience, but what really matters is action. The Minister has asked that I allow him a little more time because he wants to make some statements. I hope that he will respond to our concern on the Singapore conference and give a specific response to our questions.

12.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): This has been a good debate with some interesting speeches. I welcome the contribution from the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), who set the scene well. He knows that the Government welcome the work of his Select Committee in highlighting the often difficult and complex issue of trade and the environment. He gave an expert view on the various multilateral environmental agreements and the issues that concern his Committee. In the time available, I will endeavour to answer the specific points that he and others have raised.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish raised generally the subject of the three important multilateral environmental agreements: the Basle convention, the Montreal protocol and CITES. It is important to improve the operation of each of those agreements, which each cover issues of great global importance.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) asked in particular about the operation of CITES. He mentioned the seminar in October, which was organised by my Department, on combating environmental crime. The agencies that took part in the conference included the Environment Agency, the police and Customs and Excise, which are involved with the enforcement of wildlife law. The conference's aim was to bring those agencies together and to improve the practical enforcement of environmental law, and for the agencies to share their different and important experiences. It was a worthwhile conference and we hope to build on its work.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West generously referred to some of the recent successes in enforcing wildlife law, particularly in seizing illegal goods such as rhino horns. Such goods cause great offence to many right-thinking members of the public, who hate the idea of those goods being traded to the disadvantage and possible extinction of species elsewhere in the world. I join him in what he said about that.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish also raised the subject of eco-labelling. He knows that we fully support the European Union eco-labelling scheme and the EU's efforts to argue for an effective World Trade Organisation regime that promotes full transparency in the development and operation of voluntary eco-labelling schemes, based on a life cycle approach.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick) mentioned that it is difficult sometimes to find goods with eco-labels on them. Certain types of washing machine have an eco-label. We want more such goods in the shops so that consumers can contribute to the environment by making environmental decisions.

On the Forest Stewardship Council accreditation scheme, we are interested in sustainable forestry. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish will know that we have set out our plans for sustainable forestry and in particular the forestry standard. The Forestry Commission is carrying out consultation on a draft national standard. It is discussing differences between the United Kingdom forestry standard and the council's scheme. The hon. Gentleman will know from the evidence given to his Committee that some aspects of the scheme's criteria need investigation. No doubt the Forestry Commission will discuss those aspects with the council and it is right that those discussions should take place.

Mr. Bennett: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Clappison: Very briefly. I have much ground to cover.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister agree that it is important to establish a worldwide standard and that matters cannot be left to individual countries?

Mr. Clappison: There is certainly a logic behind worldwide efforts to maintain sustainable forestry. Britain has played its part in those efforts by entering into a number of European and global agreements. The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock) will be aware of the important part that we played in promoting forestry at the Rio summit.

The hon. Member for Penton and Reddish also referred to domestically prohibited goods. He will know that several separate agreements are in place or under negotiation requiring the identification of specific categories of goods. The World Trade Organisation committee on trade and the environment is producing a database that will cover existing agreements, but it will be necessary to return to the subject in future.

Before turning to Singapore, which has been the subject of a great deal of interest during the debate, I should like to address other specific matters that have been raised during the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Mr. Thomason) made an excellent and well-informed speech that reflected his role in the Select Committee. He was absolutely right to draw attention to the benefits of trade for developing countries and the way in which trade can spread high environmental standards. He drew attention to the high standards in United Kingdom companies which were borne out by the evidence given to the Select Committee and rightly concluded that we should be proud of their efforts on the international scene. The United Kingdom has a good environmental record both in Government and industry. My hon. Friend drew attention to the need to set a continuing high standard in future. We cannot be complacent. We have achieved a great deal and we must look forward to further challenges and further achievements by industry and Government.

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) made an interesting speech in which he used the situation affecting china clay in his constituency as an example of the difference between process-based environmental rules and product-based trade rules. It is an interesting subject. In our response to the Select Committee report and our earlier evidence to it, we recognised that there is sometimes tension between those two sets of rules which have developed against different backgrounds.

[Mr. Clappison]

Let me reiterate what we told the Select Committee. We consider that it would be helpful to explore the potential difficulties caused by different approaches and to examine the scope for solutions that, while avoiding undermining the multilateral trading system, could minimise the risk of conflict between the two systems.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: I hope that the Minister will be able to let us know whether any progress has been made at Singapore. All members of the Select Committee would like to know what is happening out there.

Mr. Clappison: Before I mention Singapore, let me turn to an important subject that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) in his intervention about animal welfare. I know that my hon. Friend had to keep another appointment. He does not need me to say what a keen advocate he is of animal welfare, as indeed is the hon. Member for Newham, North–West.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham raised the important subject of the leg-hold trap. He would be the first to understand that it would not be entirely desirable for me to speculate on the legal position of the World Trade Organisation rules in that respect. However, I certainly join him in recognising that leg-hold traps are cruel. The Government have long recognised that they are a cruel way of trapping animals and we have been working hard with our fellow European Union countries to uphold the original EU regulation that set out to ban leg-hold traps. We have been trying to keep the European Union steady to that aim. The House will be aware of recent developments, but our overriding aim is to uphold that regulation and minimise the cruelty to animals caused by leg-hold traps.

The hon. Member for Newham, North–West proposed bringing animal welfare into World Trade Organisation rules. He spoke with a strength of feeling on the subject that is widely shared among the public. He will realise that we have to work with other countries and we need more of an international consensus about animal welfare and trade rules. I entirely agreed with the hon. Gentleman when he said that we are all diminished when we lose other species. That is the thinking behind our contribution towards the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, our biodiversity plans and what we are doing to help other countries protect their biodiversity. I am sure that we all agree that it is an important subject.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hallam made an interesting speech drawing upon personal experience. He rightly highlighted the high standards set by British companies and observed that British-based companies are often involved in cleaning up pollution abroad. He drew attention to the role of water companies since privatisation in assisting other countries to deal with their pollution problems. I agree whole-heartedly with what he said about British business men who work overseas helping other countries and promoting our export efforts. He rightly paid tribute to their magnificent professionalism and their important role globally.

I have been asked about Singapore, which is of great interest to the entire House. The Singapore meeting is a useful opportunity to consolidate the work of the World Trade Organisation committee on trade and the environment. The committee has proposed a report on its work so far. I hope that we shall agree that the committee should continue its work.

I agree with hon. Members that it is disappointing that the committee was unable to agree on the need to clarify World Trade Organisation rules on trade measures taken under multilateral environmental agreements, but we look forward to continuing that work after Singapore.

I shall address the speech by the hon. Member for Deptford in a moment, but she should bear in mind the fact that we need to work internationally to reach agreements with developing countries and other developed nations. I am not sure whether some of her comments took account of that need.

I was asked what we consider to be important for the future. There are some important topics for the World Trade Organisation to explore as part of its further work. We have identified six topics as the focus of major international efforts in the near future.

First, we consider multilateral environmental agreements to be the most effective response to trans-boundary and global environment problems. We support the efforts of the European Union to clarify the relationship between trade measures in multilateral environmental agreements and GATT. If the hon. Lady is trying to suggest that there is some doubt about that, she is wrong.

Secondly, environmental policies based on processes represent an important task for the future. Thirdly, we support further examination of environmental effects. We should like to see more analysis by the World Trade Organisation of the potential environmental effects of trade proposals as they are developed. Fourthly, in respect of spreading environmental principles, there needs to be a better understanding among those concerned with trade policy of the principles and concepts underlying environmental laws and policy. Fifthly, market access for the least developed countries was of particular interest to the Select Committee.

Ms Ruddock *rose—*

Mr. Clappison: I shall not give way to the hon. Lady at this stage. I read with interest what the Select Committee said about the need to give assistance to developing countries to be represented and to make their own contributions.

Sixthly, we held a seminar on combating illegal trade in endangered species, chlorofluorocarbons and hazardous waste.

Ms Ruddock *rose—*

Mr. Clappison: Before the hon. Lady gets too carried away, I would draw her attention—

Ms Ruddock: I should like some answers.

Mr. Clappison: I have given the hon. Lady and the House many answers in a short time.

Ms Ruddock: What about Singapore?

Mr. Clappison: On Singapore, I have identified what we believe are the important subjects for the future.

The hon. Lady would do well to listen to what we have done so far. We have contributed $40 million to the multilateral fund of the Montreal protocol that was set up to meet agreed incremental costs to developing countries. That is achievement, not just talk. We recently agreed a further $29 million funding for the next three years of multilateral fund operations. Having committed £130 million so far, the United Kingdom is the fifth largest donor to the global environment facility—a project that helps developing countries and other countries in transition to meet their obligations under the biodiversity convention and the climate change convention.

The hon. Member for Deptford mentioned Singapore and made a number of false points in her speech. At the beginning, she seemed to be attacking free trade; she went through a little doubt in the middle; and, by the end, she was saying how important free trade is. The Government are in no doubt. We realise that at the Singapore meeting it is important to talk about trade and the taking down and keeping down of unnecessary trade barriers, from which historically this country has benefited so much. Free trade also has the capacity to benefit developing countries in future. There is no equivocation on the Government Benches; we support free trade.

The Government set a high premium on environmental protection, as the hon. Member for Deptford knows. We have achieved a great deal, which is there for all to see in our policies and our commitment to sustainable development. If she is interested in that, she would do well, as I told her last week, to look at her party's manifesto, which does not mention sustainable development, let alone free trade and the environment. Her contributions last week and today—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. We must move to the next debate.

Prison Estate (Isle of Wight)

12.30 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I should like to put two points on the record. First, I thank Madam Speaker through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for granting me this debate. Secondly, a jaundiced view is currently going round that somehow the art of debate, and its effectiveness in the Chamber, has lost some of its currency over recent years. However, the effect of securing a previous Adjournment debate on behalf of my constituents about a constituency problem—this debate also concerns a constituency problem—was remarkable, and with the help of the Isle of Wight council officers, we got a result. I therefore hope that no one will ever say, certainly in my hearing, that Parliament's effectiveness has been reduced over the years.

When I entered the House in 1987, I was told that the very best way to get on was to want for nothing. I had a check list of matters concerning the Isle of Wight that was slightly longer than a supermarket till printout, and gradually I have managed to put ticks beside the items. I am sure that the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), who I am delighted will be replying to the debate, will be pleased to know that the subject of the debate is just about the last major problem that I inherited on being elected. I hope that the debate, which concerns the case of the residents of the prison residential estates of Albany, Camp Hill and Parkhurst, will lubricate a solution for my constituents, not hinder it.

In May 1984, the Home Office requested that the Isle of Wight county council adopt the prison estate roads on the Albany, Parkhurst and Camp Hill residential estates. Residents were subsequently asked by the Home Office in January 1985 for £131 a household towards road maintenance, but very few paid and those who did were refunded. Following a decision to sell prison officers their homes and the implementation of the "Fresh Start" policy, a number of serious problems arose.

The problems were brought to my attention in July 1988 when the island was accepted as a water metering trial area. I was alerted to the fact that residents paid their water bills directly to the prisons and not the water company. Even more curiously, the governors of the three island prisons debited the residents for their water consumption. I wrote to the Home Office about that and the adoption of the estate roads. Southern Water considered that the water supply pipes on the estates were not up to standard. A reply from the then Minister on 27 October 1988 stated that there was no question of the water supply pipes being renewed or adopted by the Home Office.

Following a meeting that I had at the Home Office on 8 November 1988 with the then Minister and his advisers, the Home Office wrote to Southern Water on 20 December 1988 to request that water meters be installed in prison estate properties. Agreement was reached with Southern Water and the Home Office in March 1989 for a new water mains supply and pipes, which was concluded in June 1989 and cost all the estates nearly £200,000. The amount covered the total cost of the new mains and one half of the cost of connections to individual properties. I must make it clear that the other half was met by the Department of the Environment under

[Mr. Barry Field]

the water metering trial areas financing scheme. I took up the matter again in September 1989, when each household was asked to contribute £250. On 7 June 1991, a letter from the then Home Office Minister stated:

"I can confirm that the Home Office has paid for the work in connection with water metering and installation of pipes."

On 21 August 1991, the then Home Office Minister wrote to me about the cleansing, maintenance and weed growth on the roads and footpaths. That letter stated:

"Unfortunately, it has become increasingly difficult to find suitable inmates and resources"

to undertake maintenance work on roads, verges and payments. Hitherto, prisoners had formed work gangs to maintain estate roads and the general environment. Surely the letter is a clear admission of the Home Office's liability for the roads.

Another letter from the Home Office on 18 January 1993 said:

"The Head of Works has been concerned about the condition of street lighting."

Three years later, no action has been taken on a system that is by now well over 20 years old. That letter is surely another clear admission of the Home Office's liability.

Recently, the No. 30 bus service was withdrawn because the Home Office refused to allow a double-decker through the estate due to the Home Office's three-tonne limit on estate roads, yet prison vehicles way in excess of three tonnes regularly use the roads. Are my constituents to become responsible for the damage that will be caused by the weight of those vehicles on the roads if they are to assume liability as the Home Office has requested? Surely the fact that the Home Office has imposed its own weight limit is another tangible sign of liability and one that cannot be transferred to the residents.

In 1991, the residents sought a legal opinion. At the time, Mr. Attwater was the chief estates officer for the Home Office. The legal opinion stated:

"Continuing with legal points, it was suggested by Mr. Attwater"

at a meeting with the residents

"that the Residents in fact own the roads as there was a presumption in law (according to him) that a private highway was owned by adjoining landowners up to the middle of such highway. He stated that this was the view of the Treasury Solicitor."

The advice to the residents was that the solicitor did not accept that interpretation for one minute. The solicitor said:

"There may well be such a presumption but it can be easily rebutted by other evidence. In the first place, each householder is given a right of way over all the roads and footpaths without any reservation for the particular piece of highway in front of his land. Secondly, the Conveyances (which are modern), make no provision for such a statement in the Conveyance, which one would expect. Thirdly, if there was such a provision, either expressed or intended, one would have expected the Home Office to have reserved a right in all Conveyances to use the roads and footpaths.

The Home Office does not do this for the simple reason that it is not necessary. Undoubtedly, the Home Office has retained ownership of the roads in question."

He goes on to address some other points.

"Quite apart from all this, it would appear that the Home Office spent £13,000.00 on the roads a few years ago, and then called for a contribution from residents."

As I have already said, that contribution was in fact not paid by the majority of the residents and those who did had the money refunded. He continues:

"This will be quite incredible if the Home Office was now found not to be the owner of the roads after all."

He addresses the point about the street lighting:

"it seems that by mistake, provision for this was not put into the Conveyances. The Home Office has paid for street lighting ever since. Again, this would be an incredible thing to do if the Home Office was no longer the owner of the roads in which the street lighting is placed."

I reach a number of conclusions. The first is that a conditioned precedent was established when the Home Office, which at first refused responsibility for the supply of water to the residents, subsequently admitted that liability by paying for the installation of pipes to a standard that made them available for adoption by the water company. That is what the residents are asking for in respect of the street lighting and the roads. My second conclusion is that, by demanding money for the maintenance of the roads more than 10 years ago and then refunding the money, the Home Office has again admitted its liability for the maintenance of those estate roads.

The legal opinion that the residents obtained will be of considerable interest to my hon. Friend the Minister. When I became the Member of Parliament, I had a queue of prison officers in my constituency surgery each week who came to complain about the delays in the conveyancing of their homes by the Treasury Solicitor. As a result of my intervention, the Treasury Solicitor's services were dropped by one of my hon. Friend's predecessors and a local solicitor—on the mainland, I hasten to add—was appointed to take over the work. One of the first comments made by that solicitor was that the properties should not have been conveyed without a proper estate management committee having been set up. By that time, it was too late and, despite a real attempt by that solicitor's firm to sort out what is a mess, to put it politely, it was not able to do so.

My third point for my hon. Friend is that I hope that she will not rely on the Treasury Solicitor for advice on the matter because her Department has already dropped that source. The Home Office itself has sought and appointed outside advisers. Further, the legal opinion obtained by the residents happens to have been written by a solicitor whose advice is so treasured by the Home Office that it has subsequently confirmed his appointment as Her Majesty's coroner for the Isle of Wight, so I know that my hon. Friend the Minister would not wish to call into doubt the advice that he gave the residents.

My fourth point is about the reduction in the extent of Crown immunity, on which I and my hon. Friend the Minister have campaigned for some years and which is making progress as a result of the Gracious Speech. One of the points that the coroner for the Isle of Wight rightly made when he was a local solicitor in his advice to the residents is that Crown immunity is involved in the problem. I believe that that has receded into the distance and the Crown can no longer hide behind that immunity. By its actions and to some extent its defaults, it has admitted liability in its entirety.

I have one final point to ask my hon. Friend the Minister as a matter of detail which has not come out in correspondence. If the Home Office seriously maintains that there is an apportionment between the residents and

the Home Office, how many hundredth is the Home Office claiming that it owns compared with the residents? I understand the Home Office's situation, but the dwellings were not sold at a price that recognised the liability and the Department cannot hope to visit the sins of the Treasury Solicitor on the residents of the Isle of Wight—at least, not so long as I am the Member of Parliament.

In conclusion, I wish to place on record the considerable help and assistance that I have received from Richard Tilt, the Director General of the Prison Service, and his staff, and from Felix Hetherington and his staff at the Isle of Wight county council. I tried to find a solution in a land swap between the two parties that would be of such value as to make the debate unnecessary. I come to the House not as a first resort, but as a last resort and I hope that—as a result of the debate and the good will that exists on the Isle of Wight for the prisons and that exists between the Home Office and the Isle of Wight county council and as a result of my hon. Friend the Minister's intervention—when we ring out the old and ring in the new, we shall find a solution to one of the final problems that has sat on my desk for too long.

12.45 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) on obtaining the debate and also on the tireless way in which he represents the interests of his constituency. I do not know whether to be more sad or relieved that this is his last remaining problem, because that would deprive us of his ready eloquence. I feel like saying that I hope that he will find other problems, but I do not quite mean that and I am sure that he will continue to represent his constituency with all the vigour that he has shown in the past. If, as I have good reason to suspect, my hon. Friend is not satisfied with my response, I am willing to meet him, with my officials, to see whether we can make any further progress or obtain any further clarification. I may also say that my hon. Friend has shown a consistent interest in prison issues in general, for which I am extremely grateful—most of the time.

Since 1989, as part of the discounted sales scheme, the Prison Service has sold off some 90 per cent. of its housing on the former staff residential estates of Albany, Camp Hill and Parkhurst. Since then, as my hon. Friend pointed out, residents have complained that roads and services on the estates have not been maintained, and have argued that the Prison Service should retain responsibility for their maintenance.

During the past year, the Prison Service has made considerable efforts to resolve the difficulties. Prison Service officials have met representatives of the local residents associations on a number of occasions, and the Director General of the Prison Service met my hon. Friend on 18 March. On that occasion, my hon. Friend acknowledged that the difficulties experienced by the residents were complex, and suggested that the Prison Service arrange for the Isle of Wight council to adopt all liabilities on the estates, in exchange for the release of Prison Service land to the council.

We agreed to explore that possibility, and Prison Service officials met Isle of Wight council officials on 22 March to discuss my hon. Friend's proposal. However, on 29 June, the Isle of Wight council rejected the proposal, stating that it felt that it would be taking on liabilities and responsibilities far in excess of the value of the land offered. Prison Service officials met again with Isle of Wight officials on 21 October, when it was agreed that there was no quick and acceptable solution to improving the roads and services on the estate. While the council was prepared to assist with any improvements, it said that it was unable to provide capital funding for any maintenance work.

In an attempt to resolve the impasse, the Prison Service subsequently agreed that the Isle of Wight council should commission a feasibility study to establish the scope and cost of the maintenance work needed to bring the roads and services on the Albany estate to an acceptable standard for adoption by the council. While agreeing, in principle, to undertake any maintenance work, the council requested that the Prison Service should provide capital funding in advance that would then be recouped from the residents. On 29 November, the Isle of Wight council advised the Prison Service that the cost of upgrading the roads on the Albany estate would be in the region of £215,000. The Prison Service is currently considering how that work might be taken forward.

However, it would be wrong for the Prison Service to retain a responsibility for the maintenance of services to those properties. The conveyance documents—which I have been shown by the Prison Service—under which sales of the houses were arranged clearly set out the position on maintaining the roads and services applying to the properties. Although they did not include the estate roads, the conveyances for houses on the Camp Hill estate stated that there would be an obligation on the new owners to contribute to the cost of maintaining roads, footpaths, sewers, drains, water courses, gutters and electric street lighting. The conveyances for houses on the Albany estate included the transfer of ownership of the roads and made it clear that the new owners would have responsibility for maintenance, repair and removal of sewers, drains, water courses, gutters and street lighting. The conveyances for houses on the Parkhurst estate included a mixture of those conditions.

The conveyances provided for the new owners to contribute to the cost of any maintenance and improvement work. Each resident who accepted the terms of the discount sales scheme should have sought appropriate legal advice before accepting the conveyancing terms.

An independent firm of chartered surveyors, Gerald Eve, has confirmed the Prison Service's view about the terms of conveyance of the properties. Government property lawyers have confirmed that the Prison Service has no legal obligation to carry out maintenance and repairs to roads and services for the properties.

The Prison Service now owns only a small number of properties on the estates. It cannot continue to invest in those private estates from moneys voted by Parliament for the maintenance of operational prison establishments. The residents have therefore been given notice that they will be required to pay for the maintenance of roads and services in accordance with the terms of sale of their properties.

It is clear that responsibility for maintenance costs lies with the residents. That is set out in the terms of conveyance of the properties. The Prison Service has

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

attempted to resolve some of the difficulties and will consider future proposals, but it is under no legal obligation to carry out maintenance work. In future it will carry out work only after consulting local residents and obtaining their agreement that they will fund such work.

Mr. Barry Field: I am pleased to hear my hon. Friend say that. The residents were told that if they did not get themselves organised to continue the street lighting, it would be turned off. That seems a pretty brutal arrangement, particularly in a community in which the two parties co-exist so well.

Miss Widdecombe: The conveyance made clear where the responsibility for street lighting lay. It would not be proper for the Prison Service to take responsibility for the lighting. It is right that local residents should adopt the responsibilities clearly shown in their conveyances. The Prison Service will, of course, continue to repair and maintain the access roads to the prisons.

I do not wish to dismiss the issue, but the legal position is clear. The Prison Service and I remain willing to consider any proposals that the residents, the council or my hon. Friend may wish to submit. In that spirit of co-operation, I hope that we shall be able to resolve this complex issue.

12.53 pm

Sitting suspended.

On resuming—

1 pm

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was greatly involved in the discussions on the Jopling recommendations and the Adjournment debates on Wednesday mornings. At no time during those discussions was it stated that, if a Minister was not on the Front Bench when the previous debate finished, the debate could not begin. However, I think that it was stated that, if the hon. Member with the next debate was in his place, it could go ahead, and that there should be no suspension of the House because the Minister was not in his place. Has there been a change since the Jopling recommendations?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): As far as I am aware, there has been no change. This is a 1 o'clock debate. If the hon. Member and the Minister are present and the previous debate ends early, it has been the practice that the next debate can begin. But there is no obligation on a Member or a Minister to be here before the allocated time. This debate was scheduled for 1 o'clock. The Minister was not present, so it could not go ahead.

Cyprus

1.1 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): At the start of this debate, I acknowledge the presence of the mayor of Famagusta, Mr. Andreas Pouyouros, and the deputy mayor of Famagusta, Mrs. Sophie Photidis, who have travelled from Cyprus to hear this debate. Earlier this morning, they presented a petition to the Prime Minister at 10 Downing street, calling for the return of Famagusta.

Famagusta was one of the loveliest towns in Cyprus before the Turkish invasion in 1974. Now, it is a ghost town. Yet, time and time again, its return has been promised by Mr. Denktash. However, its rightful owners still await the return of their town, lands and property. I hope that today the message of this House will be clear and loud—Famagusta is Greek Cypriot; it is not and never will be Turkish. When I, the people of Famagusta and hon. Members talk about the return of Famagusta, we talk about the total return of that town to its lawful owners.

This debate takes place a matter of days before the visit to Cyprus of the Foreign Secretary, and I warmly welcome that visit. It has certainly taken a long time to get a senior Foreign Minister to visit Cyprus to discuss solely the affairs of Cyprus. I will listen with great interest to the comments of the Minister of State today about that visit.

The Foreign Secretary's visit has been clouded by his remarks on the application by Cyprus for membership of the European Union, which were highly inappropriate before such a visit. We now hear more and more that a settlement is needed first. All of us in this House who are involved in Cypriot affairs wish for a settlement, and we have campaigned for many years for an honourable settlement that protects the rights and security of Turkish Cypriots just as much as Greek Cypriots.

The record of the Republic of Cyprus since the 1974 invasion in trying to work for a settlement for the benefit of Greek and Turkish Cypriots shows that there can be no doubt about its commitment. But it is totally unacceptable to Cyprus and to many hon. Members of all parties for obstacles now to be put up to Cyprus's membership of the EU. Sadly, the Foreign Secretary is playing into the hands of Mr. Denktash and his Turkish supporters by giving them yet more encouragement to delay—as they have been doing, in the view of many of us, since 1974—their obligation to work for an honourable settlement.

The case for Cyprus and its application for membership of the EU should be considered on merit and nothing else. Turkey and Mr. Denktash must be told repeatedly—I hope that we will hear the Foreign Secretary say this during his visit—that Turkey has no veto on Cyprus's application to become a member state of the EU. Discussions of the tragedy of Cyprus have gone on since the invasion of 1974, involving countless people—many of them very honourable—who have worked for a settlement, so we know what the issues are.

Much of the country is occupied, and in referring to Famagusta, I must add that I and my colleagues are equally committed to the return of Morphou and Kyrenia. We want all the occupied areas of Cyprus, and all the land and property that has been stolen, returned to the rightful owners.

Listening to the debate today are British and Cypriot trade unionists, and I pay the warmest tribute to George Wright, the Welsh secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, and to his colleague, Jim Hancocks. To their credit, they have brought together Greek and Turkish trade unionists to discuss their future and their country. I hope that we will listen to these men and women, whose home is in Cyprus and who come from a whole range of professions. They say that they want a free Cyprus where they can live and work together, and our duty is to support them.

Surely, after 22 years of the occupation of a Commonwealth country for which we are one of the guarantor powers, we have a duty to start working for a free and united Cyprus. The message of the House and this debate must be very clear. When we talk of one Cyprus, we talk of the Republic of Cyprus where Greek and Turkish Cypriots will live, work and prosper together.

I have deliberately shortened my speech because other hon. Members may wish to speak: I acknowledge the presence in the Chamber of my hon. Friends the Members for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara), for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), And for Ogmore (Sir R. Powell), my right hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) and my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), and the hon. Members for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn), the last of whom, I know, hopes to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

1.9 pm

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): I gladly declare an interest, having been a guest of the city of Morphou and of the House of Representatives in Nicosia this summer. I congratulate the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on securing this debate while the citizens and the mayor of Morphou are in the Palace. I hope that some people outside the House will hear what we have to say.

Famagusta, Morphou and the north of Cyprus have been occupied for 22 years, which is far too long. British parliamentarians have a responsibility, as the representatives of a guarantor power, to bring back peace to Cyprus, so that both communities can live together again.

I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary on grasping the Cyprus nettle and agreeing to go there to meet both Mr. Clerides and Mr. Denktash. A solution can be found only if both sides talk together. The history of Cyprus is full of minefields for any politician who visits, and it will not be easy to find a solution, but in my heart I know that a solution is possible and that good will can prevail. I hope that the good work that Her Majesty's Government are doing will bring that forward.

The House may be surprised to learn that I, too, am a trade unionist, and that I greatly welcome the work that trade unions are doing to bring both sides together in Cyprus. We need more dialogue between Cypriot citizens of both communities. The more citizens talk together and realise their common inheritance, as well as their close links to either Turkey or Greece, the more understanding there will be.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that it is Government policy to work hard for a settlement in Cyprus, and that, regardless of the political will or lack of it on either side, the entry of Cyprus cannot be vetoed by a recalcitrant partner to the negotiations. I say that to my friends who are Greek Cypriots. There has to be a positive will, such as has been shown over the past 22 years by the Government of Cyprus. I hope and believe that that will continue, and if it does not start on the other side, we shall have to devise a means of securing the entry of the rest of Cyprus, and the rest of the Cypriots, into Europe.

1.11 pm

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), and join him in welcoming to our debate the esteemed Andreas Haralambou Pouyouros, the mayor of Famagusta, and his able deputy, Sophie Photidis.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse) : Order. The hon. Gentleman must not refer to people in the Gallery.

Mr. O'Hara: I welcome other representatives of the Greek Cypriot community and trade unionists from the Transport and General Workers Union, who have come to support us.

I remind the House of the numerous occasions on which the resettlement of Famagusta has been proposed at a high level. The British-American-Canadian framework of 1978 said:

"In order to promote an atmosphere of good will and to resolve pressing humanitarian problems, the Varosha (Famagusta) area shall be resettled under UN auspices".

In his 1978 report, the Secretary-General of the United Nations said:

"The status of Famagusta which obviously should not be kept in its present empty and decaying condition, may provide an opportunity . . . Since Famagusta is situated in the immediate vicinity of the buffer zone".

The Secretary-General went on to propose the resettlement of Famagusta by its former inhabitants under UN auspices.

In 1979, a high-level agreement between the then President Kyprianou and Mr. Denktash said:

"Priority will be given to reaching agreement on the resettlement of Famagusta under UN auspices simultaneously with the beginning of the consideration"

of other matters. Security Council resolution 550 of 1984

"considers attempts to settle any part of Famagusta by people other than its inhabitants as inadmissible and calls for the transfer of this area to the administration of the United Nations".

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is chilling to go up to the border and see the lights in Famagusta in houses that belong to Greek Cypriots but are being inhabited by settlers from Anatolia? Is that not a complete disgrace?

Mr. O'Hara: The hon. Gentleman makes my point for me. Famagusta is largely occupied by people who have no entitlement to be there. That should cease.

[Mr. O'Hara]

I conclude with some words from a poem by Dr. Kyriakos Hadjiyoannou:

"Eternal city
Paradise on earth
of the scent of lemon blossoms,
of the golden sands
and the sapphire sea,
from the depths of my heart,
in my pain
from afar,
I greet you."

May it not in the future be from afar that the citizens of Famagusta must greet their beautiful town.

1.15 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): I thank the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) for this latest opportunity to discuss the situation in Cyprus. I join him in welcoming the mayor of Famagusta and others to the country and to the House.

This is a regular event, and it reflects the importance of Cyprus to the House and to Britain. However, I am saddened by the familiarity of so much of the ground that we cover in these debates. That is a reflection not on the eloquence of hon. Members of all parties, either today or in previous debates, but on the regularity with which, year in, year out, we have heard a familiar and painful tale, of suffering and injustice, tension and mistrust, intransigence and missed opportunity—in short, a tale of failure.

To anyone in Cyprus, in the House or anywhere else, who is weary of the effort to find a solution to the problem, my message today is simple: this is a time—perhaps the time—for vigilance. We must be alert to the dangers of the situation as it stands today and to the opportunity that exists to shape a settlement before it becomes even more difficult.

We have seen far too much of the dangers already this year. The events of one hot week in August were a sickening reminder of what the United Nations Security Council means when it repeats that the status quo is unacceptable. The year just ending will be remembered in Cyprus for those and other senseless and unnecessary killings and as a year in which the ratchet of arms purchases and reinforcements on both sides clicked remorselessly round.

If 1996 is marked down as a year of danger, can 1997 come to be seen as a year of opportunity grasped? We in the Government cannot answer that question by ourselves, but we can and will recognise both our duty and our capacity to contribute to an answer. We will continue to support with action and energy all friends of a viable and lasting solution in Cyprus.

Why should 1997 be a year of progress? Does it truly offer better prospects for settlement than other years? Hon. Members will have heard about enough windows of opportunity to glaze a crystal palace, but so far those windows have all remained stubbornly shut. I should not be surprised to hear murmurs of cynicism if I were to speak of yet another, as our hopes have been raised only to be dashed on a great many occasions.

Our disappointment on those occasions has been great, but the real losers have been the people of Cyprus. Over the past 30 years, they have been expelled from their homes and prevented from travelling freely in their country, and their children have grown up knowing only a land divided.

Today's debate is well timed. Next week, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary will visit Cyprus. That will be the first such visit by a British Foreign Secretary since Cyprus gained independence in 1960. His visit is an expression of his deeply held personal commitment to helping to overcome at long last the tragic division of the island, and reflects the Government's determination to support the United Nations Secretary-General by using our best endeavours to make 1997 a year of real progress in Cyprus.

Our long-standing friendship with Cyprus, our close cultural and economic ties, and Britain's status as a guarantor power ensure our continuing interest in settlement. We owe it to the Cypriots of both communities to strive whole-heartedly for a solution that will allow all Cypriots to live peaceably together.

Much has happened since our previous Adjournment debate on Cyprus in March this year. As the House knows, Britain has intensified its efforts to help find a solution. In May, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary appointed Sir David Hannay as his special representative for Cyprus. As he reminded the House on 25 October, that did not signal a separate British initiative; rather, we consider it vital for Britain, the United States and the European Union actively to support the United Nations. All countries with an interest in promoting a safe, prosperous future for Cyprus must work closely and constructively together if we are to succeed in the search for a settlement.

Sir David Hannay has made three visits to the island, during which he probed positions on both sides and tried to identify areas of possible flexibility. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary will take a similar approach during his visit. We believe that the basis for a political settlement is already on the table. That is the result of hard, painstaking work over many years under the leadership of the United Nations, which has pursued the international commitment to Cyprus with great tenacity.

How can we once again talk of a window of opportunity? It is because of the opportunity that has been created by the prospect of the island's accession to the European Union. I mentioned the importance of that in my remarks in the debate on 6 March. As I said then, we regard the prospect of accession as a positive stimulus to an intensive search for a lasting settlement.

In that sense, the decision of the Foreign Affairs Council on 6 March 1995 that accession negotiations with Cyprus should be opened six months after the end of the intergovernmental conference was an important milestone. It emphasised that accession should benefit both communities and mandated the Commission to develop contacts with the Turkish Cypriots to discover that community's detailed concerns about EU membership and to examine how they could be met.

Several EU emissaries have visited the island to discuss those matters, most recently the representative of the EU presidency, Ambassador Heaslip, and a member of the Commission, Mr. Serge Abou. It is clear that all Cypriots

have much to gain from EU membership. That in turn should give them a strong incentive to find a mutually acceptable settlement, which would, we believe, bring European Union accession within easy reach. Membership offers not only the opportunity of the internal market and other material benefits but would give the Turkish Cypriot community in particular an acknowledged status in the wider world.

That is the 1997 window of opportunity; it means that each community has much to play for between now and the opening of accession negotiations, perhaps in early 1998, and that both are likely to be confronted by hard decisions. It is important that we underestimate neither the opportunity nor the difficulties.

The hon. Member for Tooting mentioned that, on 27 November, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary answered questions in the House on Cyprus. Some hon. Members have expressed concern that the accession of Cyprus to the EU could not go ahead unless a settlement was in place. That is not a question for the British Government alone, but it may be useful if I set out clearly an objective assessment.

The accession of Cyprus to the European Union would be far easier if it involved both communities on the island, and took place after a settlement was achieved. Any other path to accession could only be much more difficult and complex. For example, how could a Government whose writ did not in practice extend over the whole island give firm assurances that they could fulfil the EU acquis on, say, freedom of movement over the whole island?

I invite hon. Members to weigh my words carefully. I stress that they do not, as some in both Britain and Cyprus have claimed, give Turkish Cypriots a veto over the settlement. That is emphatically not the Government's position; there can be no question of that. We welcome with hope and enthusiasm the prospect of Cyprus joining the European Union. We are determined to do what we can to help Cyprus along the path to joining it, but it would be neither honest nor helpful to ignore the difficulties that may lie ahead.

The economic benefits are clear. The single market would stimulate foreign investment in the north; the restoration of international links would pave the way for a boost to the tourist sector; and northern Cyprus would be eligible for significant cohesion payments.

It is essential that we ensure that the wider Turkish Cypriot community understands the solid advantages of membership. However, I must admit that, although many Turkish Cypriot business men understand the advantages of European Union accession, Turkish Cypriot leaders do not yet appear to be convinced that the prospect of EU membership is a passport to a brighter future for their community. As the House knows, EU accession remains controversial in their eyes.

Mr. Denktash and other leading Turkish Cypriots continue to argue that the application for membership of the Cyprus Government in 1990 was illegal, having been made without the involvement of Turkish Cypriots. They fear that, once Cyprus was in the Union, it would be impossible to defend vital Turkish Cypriot community interests, and that European Union law could be used to overturn controversial safeguards designed to protect them, even if they had been previously entrenched in a settlement. Most of all, they fear erosion of their relationship with Turkey, and of the security guarantee in article IV of the 1960 treaty of guarantee, if it were held to be incompatible with EU membership.

We and the Commission believe that those fears are unfounded. We are confident that, once a federal, bizonal, bicommunal settlement has been reached that offers safeguards to both communities along the lines envisaged by the international community, it would be possible for the EU to enshrine and safeguard such a settlement in the terms of accession.

I do not wish to make any of that sound easy. For example, an arms race is in full swing on the island. There is a greater density of modern weapons and men under arms in Cyprus than in almost anywhere else in the world. That is an expression of the deep insecurity felt by its people.

However, there can be no doubt that current security arrangements give each side a sense of security only at the expense of the other. Turkish troops in the north make Greek Cypriots feel insecure, and the increasingly sophisticated armaments in the south and the defence pact with Greece alarm Turkish Cypriots. The UN is urgently working on proposals for unmanning and unloading along the ceasefire lines. The United States has proposed arrangements for a ban on overflights by Greek and Turkish military aircraft. We strongly support those initiatives. All hon. Members, after this year's events, will understand their undoubted benefits.

Security is the most important issue that divides the two sides. There will be no settlement unless both are fully satisfied about it. It will also be the essential element in ensuring that the political settlement lasts, and that, once in place, it cannot be undermined by extremist elements on either side. How might progress on security be achieved? President Clerides recently suggested some ideas for progressive demilitarisation and the presence of an international military force. Combined with the security guarantees devised at the time of Cyprus's independence, to which the Turkish Cypriots attach such importance, they could yet offer a way forward.

If the security concerns of both communities can be addressed, it should not be impossible to find solutions to other difficulties. For example, it is not yet clear how the political equality of the two communities will be expressed in the new constitution; how much territory currently occupied by Turkish Cypriots will be returned to the Greek Cypriot administration; or—this is an issue that has come up in the House before—how those who became refugees in 1974 will be compensated. Those are all matters on which much remains to be done, and about which hard decisions will have to be made.

When my right hon. and learned Friend makes his historic visit to Cyprus next week—the first since 1960—he will discuss all those issues when he meets President Clerides and Mr. Denktash. His aim will be to help them find ways in which divides can be bridged and a secure and prosperous future for Cyprus assured. That is an aim that I hope every hon. Member can support.

Haemophiliacs (Compensation)

1.29 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): The issue that we are now to discuss has been raised on a number of occasions, and has secured widespread support across both main political parties. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) has been a doughty supporter of this cause, as indeed have the hon. Members for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) and for Wallasey (Ms Eagle). I have also been supported by my right hon. Friends the Members for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) and for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) and my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam).

This is not the first time that I have raised the problem of haemophiliacs in the House. Indeed, the first time was in an Adjournment debate in October 1990. In parenthesis, I pay tribute to the tolerance, broad-mindedness and compassion of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott). At that time, I was his parliamentary private secretary, and the Whips' Office was not terribly amused at the thought of a PPS raising an issue that was not exactly complimentary of Government policy, but my right hon. Friend treated me, as all who know him would expect, with compassion, and I think that he had more than a mite of support for my cause.

My Adjournment debate was followed only a few weeks later by the Government's decision to compensate all haemophiliacs infected with human immunodeficiency virus. There are three reasons why I am still taking up the cause. First, it seems to me fundamentally wrong that individuals who suffer as a result of treatment given on the national health service should be ignored by society. If treatment creates a problem, exacerbates a situation or causes premature death or economic suffering, we as a society cannot, like the Pharisees of old, walk on the other side of the road, indifferent to the suffering that has been created.

Secondly, I once tutored a haemophiliac, and became well aware of the difficulties that haemophiliacs face. My student, who lived in Dunoon, suffered from internal bleeding. For a whole academic year, he was unable to make the journey from Dunoon to Glasgow university, so he attended not one lecture. He had to make do with a number of tutorials which I went down to Dunoon to give. As a result of not attending lectures, he came out second in the year. That showed how valuable lectures were, or it may have shown, as I tried to convince my friends with mixed success, how valuable my tuition was. Here was an individual facing great hardship and suffering, yet he worked hard to ensure that he passed his examinations, and made a positive contribution to society.

Thirdly, one of my constituents is Rev. Alan Tanner, chairman of the Haemophilia Society. He is much admired in Hendon and elsewhere for the courage that he has shown and his cheerfulness in the face of adversity. He is a good witness to his faith. The work of the Haemophilia Society is universally admired for what it does for a relatively small number of people in the United Kingdom.

Today is a happy coincidence. When Madam Speaker drew the numbers out of the ballot, she did not know that, later this afternoon the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe and I would hand in a petition at No. 10 Downing street which would demonstrate the depth of feeling among not only Members of Parliament and haemophiliacs but others who had a social conscience and recognised the need to improve the position of haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C.

In addition, this afternoon there will be a lobby of Parliament by those who feel strongly about the matter. So it is a happy coincidence that we are having this debate today, and we ought to thank Madam Speaker for being clever enough to draw my number. As I have had three Adjournment debates this Session, perhaps I ought to buy a ticket for the national lottery this weekend.

The origin of the problem goes back to the 1970s, when there was a failure to screen imported blood products. My view is that that demonstrated negligence on the part of the Department of Health. It was known at that time that, in the United States, blood donors were paid for giving blood. Those who feel so hard up that they give pints of blood for money include drug addicts and others whose blood may well be infected. The Department of Health must have known of those risks.

In the 1960s or early 1970s, the Institute of Economic Affairs produced a pamphlet entitled "Paying for Blood". Those who reviewed that pamphlet in the serious press made the point that, in the United States, where people paid for blood, infected blood was given.

So we are discussing the issue in the 1990s because there was some negligence and complacency in the 1970s. If my right hon. Friend the Member for Wealden were here, he would make the point that, at the beginning of the 1980s, he and his wife made visits to the United States. His wife is a distinguished general practitioner. She heard expressed then some of the concerns about the safety of certain blood products. In 1986, heat treatment was introduced to end the risk of contaminated blood products in the United Kingdom. We can therefore rejoice that a similar disaster will not happen in future, but we must face the consequences of the indecision of the 1970s.

The justification for giving assistance to haemophiliacs with HIV was that they faced a suspended sentence of death. Indeed, many died fairly quickly of full-blown acquired immune deficiency syndrome. Others have lingered on, and, such are the advances in medical science, some may do so for many years to come. All who have lived have done so not knowing how long they would live. Many found it difficult to get a job, and certainly difficult to get a mortgage. Of course, in the case of hepatitis C, there is a difference, but it is only of degree.

Some of those infected with hepatitis C have already died. Others will die prematurely. There has been no official estimate. Indeed, in answer to a recent parliamentary question, the Department of Health admitted that it had made no estimate of the number of those infected with hepatitis C who would die in the next five years. In the absence of an official estimate, I give my hon. Friend the Minister my estimate. At least 700 will die prematurely. For many others, the quality of life will deteriorate dramatically, and they will suffer severe physical and economic hardship. Of the 3,000 or so infected, only about 600 will make a full recovery.

It is true that those with hepatitis C do not suffer the prejudice that is associated with HIV. Those who attended a meeting in No. 1 Parliament street, as I know the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe did, listened to the victims and their families. The hardship they suffer is very

real indeed. The hardship is physical. There was a driver there who said that he had managed to drive a lorry despite suffering haemophilia, but that the additional pain associated with hepatitis C meant that he could no longer do so. He suffered the indignity of losing his job, as well as the physical pain of his illness.

Victims lose self-respect when they lose their job. They feel that they ought to be the breadwinner, but they know that they can no longer be so. For all of them there is physical pain, emotional pain and hardship. Already more than 60 have died.

There is one particular family whose experience encapsulates the problem in its entirety. In that family, three brothers have died: two were haemophiliacs infected with HIV and one was a haemophiliac infected with hepatitis C. How can we say to the mother that it was right and proper that her two sons who were infected with HIV should be the subject of compensation, but that, in the case of her son who was infected with hepatitis C, not a penny should be paid in compensation?

One would need the intellectual casuistry of a Treasury mandarin to justify such an action. To say that one death is worthy of compensation, but that another is worth nothing at all is heartless and intellectually barren. It is not only grieving relatives who find the differential unacceptable and immoral—more than 270 Members of Parliament have signed early-day motion 4, asking for compensation to be paid. The vast bulk of decent people find the differential unacceptable.

Of course, we welcome the fact that the Department of Health is funding treatment to try to improve victims' quality of life. I also welcome the research into haemophilia that is taking place at the Royal Free hospital, which helps to give hope that, in future, haemophilia will cease to be the scourge that it has been, and that it will be eradicated.

When my hon. Friend the Minister was asked earlier this year whether he would provide help, he argued that the Department of Health budget should be used for patient care. Everyone accepts that the Secretary of State and his Ministers should try to protect the Department of Health budget—indeed, I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on his success in so doing—but the argument that help should be denied because the health budget must be protected is intellectually threadbare and immoral.

We all know that, when the Macfarlane Trust was set up, for which measure our right hon. Friend the Leader of the House was responsible, no one said that the money would have to come out of the Department of Health's budget. There is a thing called the contingency fund that can be used to bail out Departments in such circumstances; when, in 1990, compensation was paid to haemophiliacs with HIV, the contingency fund bailed out the Department of Health—the money did not come out of the Department's budget. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary should remember that, because he was the Secretary of State for Health at that time.

The Haemophilia Society has, in a statesmanlike way, recognised the Treasury's problems, and said that its immediate priority is the creation of a hardship fund to help the relatives of those who have died, and those who are too ill to work. The cost of such a fund would be somewhere about £12 million to £15 million. That is a small price to pay to ensure that hardship is relieved—it is a mere bagatelle in the totality of Government expenditure. We can all think of ways in which Government money is wasted, and anyone who says that that small sum cannot be found cannot be looking very hard.

Thereafter, we have to look to the future. There would be merit in setting up an inquiry to hear what outside experts say about the number of people who will die and the extent of the hardship created. The inquiry could also look into the possibility of doing more to help those who have been so unfortunate as to receive what was thought at the time to be a good treatment—one that would improve their life expectancy and give them a better quality of life—which has instead destroyed their quality of life and, in many cases, reduced their life expectancy and caused great economic hardship. That we should refuse to give assistance to a small group of people who are suffering through no fault of their own is not to the honour of this country, and it is not moral.

1.44 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I was glad to learn that the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) had secured this timely debate, and I most warmly endorse his moving plea.

Sadly, more than 60 of the victims of the tragedy have already gone to their graves with a deep sense of injustice. The achievement of elementary justice for some very needful people is at the heart of our campaign, which, as the hon. Member said, is now supported by more than 270 Members of Parliament of all parties. Our campaign is also about morality. The Government accepted their moral responsibility in the case of HIV infection in the course of national health service treatment. They now have the same responsibility in the hepatitis C cases.

It is morally wrong to deny the victims of this appalling further tragedy in the haemophilia community the modest help they seek. What is morally wrong ought no longer to be tolerated in Britain. There is ample parliamentary time available. The Government's legislative programme is gossamer thin, and, given the nod by Ministers, I am sure that the House would approve within an hour the help we seek.

1.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): It is almost exactly a year since we had a similar debate on this subject. At that time, it was the hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) who was successful in the ballot. Today, it is my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) who has initiated the debate. That is entirely appropriate. Not only is his constituent Rev. Alan Tanner the chairman of the Haemophilia Society, whose work in this field we all applaud, but my hon. Friend has himself taken a continuing interest in the plight of those patients with haemophilia who were inadvertently infected with hepatitis C through blood products, before those products began to be heat-treated in 1985.

I was interested to learn that my hon. Friend's first Adjournment debate on this subject was as long ago as October 1990, which must be some sort of record. He stated his case today not only movingly, as the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) said, but extremely eloquently. I answered a related question

[Mr. John Horam]

from my hon Friend only two weeks ago; he is also a sponsor of early-day motion 4, which was tabled this Session; and I am also aware of early-day motion 9, which was tabled last month.

Health Ministers have had the opportunity twice this year to meet with my hon Friend to discuss these issues. The discussions which I have had with my hon Friend and with representatives of the Haemophilia Society have brought home to me very clearly the plight of those who find themselves infected with hepatitis C, in addition to suffering from haemophilia. Nobody could fail to sympathise with the distress of people who, already suffering from one disorder, have found that the treatment for that disorder has given them another.

That is especially true because factor 8 transformed the lives of many people with haemophilia—we should not forget that it greatly increased their life expectancy and improved their quality of life. It was undoubtedly the best treatment available for people with haemophilia in the light of medical knowledge at the time. However, medical procedures rarely come without risk, and those are not always known about or capable of being guarded against in time.

Factor 8, at the time at which the people we are talking about were infected, was made from human plasma and, for the most part, it still is. We have a very safe blood supply, thanks to the voluntary basis of the scheme—that contrasts with the scheme in America, to which my hon. Friend referred—and because of the screening and other safety measures that are in place. I am glad to say that UK blood remains among the safest in the world.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): Will my hon. Friend clear up a point about factor 8? In a previous debate, I asked about factor 8 treatment. None of us is a medical scientist, but I believe that there is a genetically manufactured form of factor 8, called, I think, recombinant factor 8. Am I right in saying that it could help to prevent further infection?

Mr. Horam: In answer to my right hon. Friend, whose interest in this area I also acknowledge, it is for clinicians to decide whether to use the plasma-based factor 8 or recombinant factor 8. I should stress that, although recombinant factor 8 has some advantages, it is not without disadvantages. For example, it can encourage the development of inhibitors, a problem that has been encountered by some of those who have used recombinant factor 8. So neither is without a small element of risk.

My right hon. Friend will recall that recombinant factor 8 uses plasma-derived albumin as a stabiliser, and therefore is not entirely free of problems. Nothing is totally risk-free, and it must be for clinicians to decide which of the two, given also their relative cost, is best to use.

May I return to the issue of blood and blood products? All reasonable steps are taken to ensure their safety, including the careful questioning of donors to exclude those likely to represent a risk of transmitting infection, and the testing of donations for hepatitis B and C, HIV 1 and 2, and syphilis. Pools of plasma from which blood products are to be made are tested again, and, wherever it is possible, as it is with factor 8, undergo manufacturing processes to remove or inactivate viruses. Also, all batches of blood products are separately tested for viral markers of infection by the independent National Institute for Biological Standards Control.

The safety of blood and blood products is kept under regular review by the expert Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Blood and Tissues for Transplantation, which advises Health Ministers.

Not all the current safety measures that I have mentioned were available at the time that we are discussing today. That was a long time ago—before blood products began to be heat-treated in 1985 to destroy viruses. I stress that factor 8, which has been treated to destroy viruses, has an excellent safety record.

Nor was there at the time a test available for detecting hepatitis C in blood donations. Such testing was introduced in 1991 as soon as reliable tests first became available. The people we are discussing today therefore received the best treatment available at the time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South mentioned numbers. Let me remind the House of the number of people we are talking about. It is thought that some 4,000 people with haemophilia may have been infected with hepatitis C through blood products before heat treatment of those products was introduced. Of those, about 1,000 were, sadly, also infected with HIV, and have received payments under the HIV-haemophilia scheme. In addition, possibly a further 3,000 people who are still alive, who had blood transfusions before September 1991 and who have been infected with hepatitis C as a result, are likely to be identified by the look-back exercise that is in progress.

It has been suggested in this debate that there have been more than 50 deaths of haemophiliacs from liver disease so far. We have no reason to dispute that figure. However, many people infected with hepatitis C may enjoy a long period without any symptoms appearing. Some 50 per cent. of sufferers may progress to chronic hepatitis with varying degrees of good and ill health. Some 20 per cent. of infected patients may develop cirrhosis, a progressive destruction of the liver, which may take 20 to 30 years. Fortunately, the majority of those years will be trouble-free in terms of health.

Since last year's debate, I have studied the final version of a report from the Haemophilia Society on the plight of the people we are discussing today, and in March I met representatives of the society to discuss it. The meeting covered a range of issues concerning haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C, and I outlined the action that the Government are taking, including research and support for voluntary organisations working in that field.

The Haemophilia Society subsequently wrote to me in June asking for the Government to set up a trust fund to make payments to those infected who were in financial need, and their dependants, and also to make payments to each person who had been infected. As my hon. Friend stressed, that is similar to the help previously given to those infected with HIV.

I took time to consider these proposals carefully before replying to the Haemophilia Society in October. Most hon. Members will by now be aware that I did not accept the society's proposals for payments for those infected with hepatitis C, but I stressed that I remained open to further arguments. I also outlined the support that we are giving to work with those infected, and to research in this area.

I should mention that the society understandably prefers that the financial assistance that it requested should not be described as "compensation"—particularly as it does not consider the NHS to have been negligent in this matter. However, my reasons for not agreeing to provide the help requested hold good, however we describe the financial help sought.

First, we do not accept—I disagree with my hon. Friend on this—that the NHS has been negligent. As I said, the Haemophilia Society has confirmed that it does not dispute that point. Tragic though it may be that the treatment designed to help those infected patients should have harmed them, there can be no question but that they received the best treatment available at the time. That treatment was essential for their survival. There was no alternative. We take the view that compensation is appropriate only where there has been negligence.

If we were to provide payment on the basis of non-negligent harm, that would very quickly develop into a general no-fault compensation scheme, which would be both unworkable and unfair. That point was considered in relation to the settlement of HIV cases. On that occasion, we were convinced by the very special nature of the disease, by public reaction to it, and by arguments that it would not lead to further similar claims for compensation.

We are not convinced that hepatitis C falls into the same special category. We need to remember that, at the time of the HIV settlement, it was believed that HIV would lead speedily to death and that some haemophiliacs infected with HIV, especially children, were subject to some appalling examples of ostracism. We now know rather more about the effects of HIV, and there is a much greater public understanding of how relatively limited are the ways in which it can be passed on. We are all grateful for that.

Secondly, as my hon. Friend said, all the proposals for payment schemes involve the expenditure of substantial sums of public money. I have considered a wide range of options for such schemes—I really have done that—including the possibility of a scheme limited to those who go on to develop cirrhosis only. But they all have significant costs. As a Health Minister, I have a duty to consider the effect of such a sizeable sum on other heath service expenditure. That duty has led me to conclude that funds that are available to the NHS, from whatever source, are best used in direct patient care.

It has been suggested—it was reiterated today by my hon. Friend—that there should be funding compensation sources other than from the national health service budget. Naturally, I am sympathetic to that suggestion. Given their knowledge of how the Government work, right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken in this debate will understand that those matters are not within the compass of my duties as Health Minister, and they must look to other Ministers to put their case, particularly as regards the contingency fund, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South mentioned. It has also been suggested that money from the national lottery might be used in this case. Again, that matter can be pursued independently through the national lottery.

In its letter to me in June, the Haemophilia Society suggested a need for progress in a number of areas of work on hepatitis C, such as the treatment and care of those infected, research and public education. I want to help the society in supporting its work in that area.

A key priority must be to improve our understanding of the disease. We have made an additional £1 million available to aid research into hepatitis C, its natural history, transmission and prevalence. Although primarily geared to improving the understanding of the disease, any developments will be important to co-sufferers of haemophilia.

One of the best ways to improve still further the treatments available is to establish the relative effectiveness of new treatments such as alpha interferon. Local purchasers can then make informed decisions on using resources for the most effective treatments available for both haemophilia and hepatitis C. The standing group on health technology has identified the evaluation of the use of alpha interferon in the treatment of hepatitis C as a priority for the NHS. That work is being taken forward as speedily as possible by the National Coordinating Centre for Health Technology.

We have also been providing assistance to the Haemophilia Society in the form of grants from a Department of Health scheme for voluntary organisations, which includes a grant for a project concerned with the needs of those with haemophilia, who have also been infected with hepatitis C. I made it made clear to the society that we shall welcome proposals from it to provide continuing support to haemophiliacs infected with hepatitis C, as part of the society's on-going activities.

I regard this as a useful and practical approach, which would draw on the valuable findings of the research that the society is already undertaking. This is an area where resources can be directly targeted to provide practical help in such forms as advice and information. It will thereby improve services to infected haemophiliacs. I have assured the society that I shall take a positive view of any application for further assistance from the Department under our section 64 scheme to take this matter forward.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Employment Statistics

1. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the role played in the formulation of her Department's policy by (a) the figures for those unemployed and claiming benefit and (b) the labour force survey. [7051]

The Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): Both statistics are valuable and confirm that the Government's policies are working.

Mr. Foulkes: I am almost speechless after that reply. The Minister must surely admit that the labour force survey shows that one household in five contains an unemployed person. The New Cumnock survey showed that the real level of unemployment is double the published figure. The Minister must therefore admit that the published figure is entirely bogus, as it shows only the number of people entitled to claim benefit. After 32 fiddles by the Government, that is a false and inaccurate figure.

Mr. Forth: Presumably the hon. Gentleman is a fan of the International Labour Organisation. If he were not, he would be unusual on the Labour Benches. I assume that most Labour Members admire the ILO and all its doings—a view that I do not necessarily share. As the labour force survey—the approved ILO method of establishing who is out of work—closely mirrors our own claimant count, I am astonished at the hon. Gentleman's outburst. Our claimant count shows just over 2 million people out of work. The labour force survey shows a similar number. According to our figures, the percentage of unemployment is seven point something; according to the labour force survey it is 8.1. By any measure, the two sets of figures show broadly the same absolute level and broadly the same downward trend in unemployment. If the hon. Gentleman is criticising the claimant count, he is also, by implication, criticising the ILO. He had better take that up with his colleagues.

Mr. Devlin: Can my hon. Friend tell me what proportion of the working-age population is currently in work, and how that compares with comparable countries in the European Union?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The United Kingdom has one of the highest proportions of people of working age in employment. That is because we have traditionally provided and continue to provide people with the maximum opportunity to be employed. If Labour Members believe, as they occasionally imply, that a European model is to be admired and emulated, I invite them to consider the fact that in most European countries not only is the percentage of unemployment higher, but the proportion of the work force who are employed is much lower than in the UK. We gain on every score.

Nursery Vouchers

2. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will estimate how many play groups have gone out of business as a result of the nursery voucher scheme. [7052]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I expect the number of pre-schools in the nursery voucher scheme to fluctuate, as they open and close for a variety of reasons.

Mr. Heppell: Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that, far from broadening parental choice, the voucher scheme has led to the closure of nurseries and play groups in both the voluntary and the private sector. Does that not erode the choice available to parents?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman should understand the position. A number of pre-schools have left the scheme, but that is because of the cyclical nature of admissions to school. The number of four-year-olds drops in the autumn term because many schools have long-established policies of admitting children at the start of the year in which they turn five. Therefore, there will be fewer parents of four-year-olds looking for places for their children in voluntary and private provision in the autumn term. Pre-schools and others are used to that pattern. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is surprised.

Mr. Riddick: Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of the reasons why play groups face some problems in the pilot areas is that the legal limit for the pupil-teacher ratio is lower in private play groups than in those funded by local education authorities? Is she aware that the chief inspector of schools told the Select Committee last week that he considered it important to have a level playing field and to ensure that parents were given genuine freedom to choose? Will my right hon. Friend examine the position?

Mrs. Shephard: Schools should certainly think carefully before taking large numbers of young four-year-olds into reception classes, but the type of service that they provide for that age group will be scrutinised carefully in the course of the Office for Standards in Education inspections.

Ms Estelle Morris: Will the Secretary of State confirm that £56 million was cut from the nursery voucher scheme in the Budget, and that her Department's explanation is that it changed its mind about the number of four-year-olds in the population? If that is the case, rather than giving up £56 million from the Budget, why does the right hon. Lady not use the money to extend nursery education to the 56 per cent. of three-year-olds who are currently denied it?

Mrs. Shephard: There will be a place for every four-year-old whose parents want one, over time. We have been entirely consistent about that guarantee. I remind the hon. Lady and her hon. Friends that as recently as November the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) said that under Labour three-year-olds

would be guaranteed places—only to have that denied by the financial fiasco of Labour's costings, which was revealed a few days later.

Unemployment

3. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the report of the International Labour Organisation concerning levels of unemployment; and if she will make a statement. [7053]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. James Paice): We welcome the fact that the ILO agrees that the United Kingdom is the only major industrialised country with falling unemployment, and that our job assistance and advice service is working well.

Mr. Fabricant: Is it not ironic that the Labour party has been saying for years that we have been lying about the fall in our unemployment figures, but the ILO has now vindicated what we have been saying for the past few years? Has not the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development also been saying that this is because the social chapter has been creating unemployment in Europe? Does that perhaps explain why today's *Daily Mail* says that the Leader of the Opposition is now going to ditch the social chapter?

Mr. Paice: I am sure that my hon. Friend is not alone in being interested in that article. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that others are interested—not least the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), who has just said from a sedentary position that even he was interested. That just shows that, yet again, he is not being consulted on these matters. If it is indeed true that the Leader of the Opposition intends to ditch his commitment to the social chapter, that just proves yet again that he is prepared to change his mind on any issue in his desperate search for power.

Mr. MacShane: May I tear the Minister away from the *Daily Mail* and its fantasies? He has praised the ILO report. Will he now tell the House that the British Government, who founded the ILO, will abide by its conventions and implement its recommendations in all regards?

Mr. Paice: We judge each case on its merits.

Mr. Tredinnick: Does my hon. Friend agree that the best possible Christmas present for my Leicestershire constituents is the news that unemployment is down to under 3 per cent. and the number of vacancies has risen by nearly 100 in a year? Does that not vindicate not only the policy of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, but the labour force survey and its recent findings?

Mr. Paice: I am sure that my hon. Friend knows best what it is right for his constituents to receive for Christmas, not just this year but next year and in the years ahead. When he talks to his constituents, he will doubtless bear it in mind that the United Kingdom—with no social chapter and no minimum wage—has more people in work and fewer out of work than any of the other major European countries.

Mr. Hain: Why does the Minister not come clean and admit that the unemployment figures hide the Government's shameful jobs record? Is he aware that his ministerial colleague the Economic Secretary admitted that since 1979, when the Tories came to power, Britain has fallen to 17th in the international jobs league, far behind all our major competitor countries? For millions of people, employment in Britain is now poor, nasty, brutish and short. The nation is haunted by job insecurity and even if Conservative Members will not admit that, they will find it out for themselves at the next general election.

Mr. Paice: The hon. Gentleman forgot one thing—the fact that 768,000 extra jobs have been created since the last recession.

Mr. Congdon: Is it not good news that the unemployment rate in this country has fallen by more than 900,000 since its peak, in sharp contrast to the higher and increasing unemployment rates among our major competitors such as France and Germany? Does that not clearly show the dinosaurs in the Opposition that it would be absolutely crazy for this country to introduce socialist measures such as the minimum wage and the social chapter?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Every survey and study shows that Britain's unemployment record is an example to the rest of Europe. Countries that are not at the top of the jobs league and European business men also realise that our labour market is the best.

Pupil Exclusions

4. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what new proposals she has on returning excluded pupils to full-time education. [7054]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Education Bill will require local education authorities to publish a full statement of their arrangements for pupils with behavioural problems.

Mr. Soley: Will the Secretary of State give a careful and considered response to the report prepared by the university of Plymouth for the Economic and Social Research Council which shows that something like 60 per cent. of excluded children have a history of neglect, abuse or violence at home? Does she agree with the all-party group on parenting matters, who believe that there is a serious need for the Government to co-ordinate a response to such problems across Departments and between Government Departments and local authorities?

Mrs. Shephard: I have not yet seen the report that the hon. Gentleman mentions and about which he had the courtesy to forewarn me. He will know that once the Education Bill is enacted, we shall be issuing detailed guidance to local education authorities on the implementation of the new behaviour support plans. For the first time, there will be a requirement for proper co-ordination between schools, local education authorities and social services. We are also looking to see how else we can promote good practice in joint working between education and social services in that sphere.

On the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, with the Department of Health we are considering options to help collaboration through a number of pilot projects so

as to spread any lessons that might be learnt. The hon. Gentleman is right that there needs to be more collaboration between agencies for some of these children.

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) has raised a very interesting matter. Many hon. Members will agree that far too many youngsters are now being excluded from schools. Does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agree that exclusions result in those children who would benefit most from being in school being left out? Has she had an opportunity to read what the Commission for Racial Equality said about the total cost of exclusions, which I believe was part of the point made by the hon. Member for Hammersmith? Will my right hon. Friend join me in seeking alternatives to exclusion, of which corporal punishment might be one?

Mrs. Shephard: The Government's views on corporal punishment have been set out by me and by others. My hon. Friend's views are equally well known to the House. I remind him of the findings of the recent Ofsted report on exclusions, which pointed out that good teaching in particular is likely to be the solution to many behavioural problems. The report also said that schools which exclude few pupils tend to be better at managing behaviour than those which exclude many.

Mr. Davidson: Let us return to the serious issue of excluded students, and not talk nonsense about corporal punishment. When will the Government recognise that an increasing number of young people who have been excluded from school join the large percentage—14 per cent.—of people who receive no education or training beyond the age of 16? That is a shameful record, and an indictment of 17 years of Conservative rule.

Mrs. Shephard: As the festive season is approaching, I do not wish to be ungracious to the hon. Gentleman. I merely mention Calderdale and Labour control as providing a lesson in how not to cope with behaviour problems. It is clear that a well-structured and soundly taught curriculum is the best way of dealing with unruly behaviour. Some pupils are demotivated and thus at risk of disaffection, and they will be helped by the relaunch provisions and entry qualifications arrangements outlined in the White Paper that I announced on Monday.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend think that the old maxim which is often applied in schools as it is in families—"Spare the rod and spoil the child"—is entirely out of date?

Mrs. Shephard: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey).

Training and Enterprise Councils

5. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she next plans to meet representatives of training and enterprise councils to discuss the future of training. [7055]

9. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she next plans to meet with the training and enterprise councils to discuss the future of training. [7059]

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend and I meet regularly with TEC representatives to discuss a wide range of topics, including the future of training.

Mr. Eastham: When the Minister next speaks to the TEC organisation, will he discuss the serious problem of skill shortages? How does he reconcile those shortages with the fact that the budget for TECs has been cut by £34 million and that that figure will increase when the inflation factor is taken into account? How does he justify the merger with local chambers of commerce, which are using TEC funding—private organisations using public money—and how will that help the 600,000 young people under 25 who have no jobs?

Mr. Paice: On mergers with chambers of commerce, the public funding of the TEC parts of those organisations is closely audited and there is no question of its being used for other matters related to the chamber of commerce.

On overall funding, the reality is that we will be spending more money on programmes for young people, more on work experience and more on TEC discretion. The only significant reduction will be in training for work: we expect to spend 4.5 per cent. less than forecast for this year while unemployment has decreased by 10 per cent. in the same period.

Mrs. Prentice: Is the Minister aware that not only have 600,000 young people under the age of 25 no job or education or training place, but 250,000 young people have been out of work for more than six months? What guarantee of a future can the Minister give them in view of the cuts that the Government have made in the TEC budgets?

Mr. Paice: The overall number of opportunities provided by TECs and the Employment Service is not being reduced—there are just as many. Young people who have not found their way into the work force for a long period will benefit from the tripling of opportunities in pre-vocational programmes next year. It has been clearly established that one of the problems is that some of those youngsters do not have the basic skills on which to build a vocational qualification. The Employment Service offers the one-to-one programme. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, in the longer term the measures announced in the White Paper on Monday will guarantee all young people a good opportunity for training or education up to national vocational qualification level 3.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the most significant developments is the growth of modern apprenticeships? As industry is so concerned to improve training for young people, the fact that 67,000 modern apprenticeships are due to be on stream by 2000 is good news, and a clear demonstration of the Government's commitment to that policy.

Mr. Paice: I welcome my hon. Friend's remarks. He is right that industry and commerce across the piece have

widely accepted modern apprenticeships, not just in the traditional vocations but in many modern and novel vocations. The success of modern apprenticeships has led us to adopt the same approach to the development of national traineeships which we outlined on Monday.

Mr. Byers: Can the Minister confirm that he has received the strongest possible representations from the TEC movement urging the Government to submit an application under objective 4 of the European social fund? Does he accept that a failure to submit such a programme would mean the loss of £140 million from Europe which is badly needed to assist in-work training? Even at this late stage, will the Minister give an assurance that further consideration will be given to an application for objective 4 funding under the European social fund?

Mr. Paice: I do not accept the position as the hon. Gentleman describes it, but the Government will be setting out their position on objectives 3 and 4 in the near future.

Jobseeker's Allowance

6. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what policies she intends to pursue to increase the opportunity for full–time employment for people on jobseeker's allowance. [7056]

Mr. Forth: We shall continue to pursue the policies which have led to our having more people in work and fewer unemployed people than any other major European Union country.

Mr. Connarty: Is the Minister not ashamed to be still dragging his heels and refusing to bring in regulations to ban sex advertisements in publications such as those revealed this year in a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney)? Will he now do something about that and, as we have requested, bring in regulations to ban advertisements for sexual services in publications in jobcentres, which up to this point he has refused to do?

Mr. Forth: I can understand the hon. Gentleman getting excited about this subject, but we should all take it—*[Interruption.]* There is no point in the hon. Gentleman waving bits of paper around and shouting about bans. The matter is being dealt with in the proper way. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is taking a direct interest in the matter and—

Mr. Connarty: I am speaking of a ban.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman keeps shouting from a sedentary position about a ban. That seems to be the only thought that occurs to Opposition Members when a problem arises. This is a complicated matter. It is not simple or straightforward. My right hon. Friend and I have discussed it with the chief executive of the Employment Agency, new guidelines have been prepared and legal advice has been taken. The new guidelines will be issued shortly and they will be in the public domain. The matter has been dealt with in a calm, proper and constructive way.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: Will my hon. Friend give careful consideration to the postal signing arrangements for the jobseeker's allowance, bearing in mind the fact that some of the people seeking full-time employment have particular specialist backgrounds and their continued appearance at jobcentres at some cost to themselves will not necessarily add materially to their prospects of obtaining the full-time employment for which they are experienced?

Mr. Forth: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but it is not only proper but desirable that those people who unfortunately are out of work and claiming benefit deserve the fullest possible support from the expert staff in our jobcentres. We make appropriate, realistic and proper arrangements for people to claim by post where that is appropriate, but equally it is right that the bulk of people who can make a journey easily should come to our jobcentres, share their experiences with us and receive our advice and support. That includes people of all types and backgrounds. To start to try to make a distinction of the kind that my hon. Friend understandably suggests would probably be rather difficult and I am not sure that it would be wise.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Will the Minister acknowledge that the Employment Service is using jobseeker's directions and the threat of benefit sanctions to drive people to take part-time jobs which they cannot legally be required to take? Should he not also be very worried that less than 3 per cent. of the Government's target number of employers have availed themselves of the relief from national insurance contributions offered when they recruit someone who has been unemployed for more than two years? Does that not show that the policy has been badly designed and badly implemented?

Mr. Forth: On the first point, if the hon. Gentleman has any evidence of his allegation, I hope that he will share it with me so that I can have it properly considered, but I am not happy with his implication that part-time work is somehow undesirable, menial or no good. As he should know, many people welcome the opportunity to move from unemployment into part-time work, either of their own choice or often as a useful stepping stone into full-time employment, if that is what they want. Part-time employment has a proper part to play in our labour market and we wish to encourage such employment at all times. However, I should like to follow up the hon. Gentleman's question, so if he is referring to specific cases, perhaps he will please let me have details of them.

Local Education Authorities (Administration)

7. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many local education authorities increased the amount spent on administration and reduced the amount spent on schools in the last year for which information is available. [7057]

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Robin Squire): In 1994-95, there were 14 such authorities. This year the Government have announced a further hefty increase—an extra £633 million—in provision for local education authorities. I urge all LEAs to deliver that spending power to schools and not to use it to fund bureaucracy.

Mr. Steen: Will the Minister confirm that next year Devon's county education budget will increase by over

3 per cent. and that that money will go to schools and not to administration? Will he say something to the misguided and wholly unacceptable banner-waving groups in my constituency who are crying, "Cuts in education," when everyone knows that Devon education has never had more money than it will have next year?

Mr. Squire: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. I can confirm that the increase in Devon's education standard spending assessment is 3.8 per cent., which is above the national average. Of course—as he is aware, but as some of his constituents, misled by placard wavers, may not be aware—between 1979-80 and 1994-95 the Government increased funding per pupil by 48 per cent., after taking out all inflation. We have a proud record on funding. It is clear that Devon has the resources and I hope that it, and all LEAs, will devote a lion's share of the increases to schools rather than to town hall and county hall.

Mr. Jamieson: Will the Minister confirm that Devon is in the lowest 15 in Britain for spending on central administration and has a fine record? Perhaps he will also confirm, however, that the high spenders on central bureaucracy are Westminster [HON. MEMBERS: "Tory"], Wandsworth [HON. MEMBERS: "Tory"], Kensington and Chelsea [HON. MEMBERS: "Tory"] and the City of London [HON. MEMBERS: "Tory"].

Mr. Squire: I was going to keep a shroud over the list of 14 authorities in the original question, but as the hon. Gentleman tempts me to name some of them, I can confirm that Sheffield, Camden and Durham are also in that list.

Sir Malcolm Thornton: My hon. Friend is aware of the success of the delegation of budgets to schools and we would all like the maximum amount of money to be transferred from LEAs to schools, consistent with the provision of those essential central services. Does he accept that, because of the tendency to enshrine historic expenditure in the local formula adopted by the vast majority of LEAs, anomalies have started to appear over time? Will he confirm that the Department is still working towards an evaluation of the need for a national formula for funding?

Mr. Squire: I can certainly confirm my hon. Friend's last point. We are taking careful account of the many representations that we received in the consultation earlier this year.

On what I judge to be my hon. Friend's central point about local management of schools schemes and the way in which local authorities distribute funding to schools, it is a good responsibility for LEAs to keep such things up to date and to take account of the points that my hon. Friend has made.

Mr. Don Foster: Does the Minister agree that a great deal of humbug is talked about the amount of money spent on administration in education? Will he confirm that the White Paper published in the summer shows that, on average, administration costs represent about 1.8 per cent. of the total cost per pupil? Will he further confirm that that figure is considerably less than the amount spent by his Department and the Funding Agency for Schools on administration in respect of pupils in grant-maintained schools?

While we are on the subject of humbug, does the Minister accept that his answer to the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) was complete humbug? He tried to tell the House that the Government were making more money available for education, when the Red Book shows that the amount of money that central Government are providing to local government is being cut in real terms.

Mr. Squire: The hon. Gentleman has underlined why we invariably look to the Liberal Democrat Benches for classic humbug as opposed to occasional humbug.

On administration, I can give the hon. Gentleman a straight answer. What matters is how each and every local authority and central Government make efficiency savings year on year. Averages often disguise the truth. What matters is that all LEAs have the same commitment to delivering quality services. I repeat for the benefit of the hon. Gentleman, who may not have heard me, that we are providing significant additional funding to schools this year and we expect it to be spent predominantly on the schools themselves.

Mr. Dunn: Given that Labour and Liberal Democrat-controlled Kent county council is one of the worst offenders and spends a huge amount of money on administration, will my hon. Friend arrange for an official inquiry into the spending plans and policies of that county council to reduce that huge sum so that extra funds can be given to the county's schools? It is a nightmare for the people of Kent.

Mr. Squire: Obviously, I shall consider my hon. Friend's suggestion, but I know, from his long experience in education matters and his knowledge of the highways and byways, that he will continue to publicise the poor administration record of the Labour and Liberal Democrat-controlled Kent LEA.

Mr. Dafis: Have not schools shown strong resistance to any proposals to increase the compulsory percentage of money delegated to their budgets? Is that not why the proposal in the White Paper was withdrawn? Is it not time to introduce greater flexibility, as schools bear a heavy administrative burden and small schools in particular find it difficult to cope with heavy management responsibilities? Could that not be achieved through sensible county-wide negotiations between LEAs and federations of school governors?

Mr. Squire: First, let me confirm that the proposal in the summer White Paper has not been withdrawn. It does not feature in current legislation, precisely because there is a need for widespread consultation among schools and LEAs and because some of the figure work will be fairly complex. Secondly, I am quite prepared to believe that some schools do not wish to have a greater share of their budget devolved to them. However, in response to the central issue that the hon. Gentleman raises, the record of grant-maintained schools—which control 100 per cent. of their budgets—shows overwhelmingly that they achieve better value for money. I am confident that, if LEA schools controlled a greater share of their budget, they could do the same.

Job Creation

8. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she last met the representatives of other member states in the Council of Ministers to discuss job creation. [7058]

Mr. Forth: Whenever other United Kingdom Ministers and I meet our European counterparts, we make it clear that the way to create jobs is through the development of efficient, flexible and competitive labour markets, not through imposing new legislative burdens on employers which only damage competitiveness and destroy jobs.

Mr. Marshall: As the United Kingdom is in the premier league of job creation and countries such as Germany are in the third division, will my hon. Friend ask my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to host a seminar on job creation in Dublin this weekend so that Chancellor Kohl can discover that we in Britain can teach him a thing or two?

Mr. Forth: I suspect that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been given quite a lot of advice about what he might say in Dublin this weekend from a number of different quarters, and I therefore hesitate to add even my hon. Friend's words of wisdom. He makes the valid point that we can now conclude safely that the route that we have chosen to take and the policies that we have chosen to pursue to create an environment that is friendly to job creation and business and attractive to inward investment present a far better chance of creating the maximum number of jobs—real jobs, jobs for the future—than the route chosen by our continental partners. That is becoming clear. The extent to which our partners have been persuaded by that argument will perhaps be better known after the Dublin summit.

Mr. Sheerman: Before the Minister goes to the Council of Ministers with his usual bundle of prejudices, will he talk to the Business Services Association and other major employers that want a national minimum wage because they believe that it will raise standards, create jobs and stop the scandal of spending £3 billion of taxpayers' money on subsidising poor employers?

Mr. Forth: Of course we listen to all groups and all representations on such matters; that has always been so. I must admit to a slight lingering suspicion that some groups take the view that the imposition of a statutory minimum wage would help to eliminate competition that they find difficult and unhelpful. If a statutory minimum wage were ever to eliminate new, thrusting, dynamic, entrepreneurial businesses, which tend to compete with established businesses, it would demonstrate beyond a doubt that the policy of a minimum wage, so beloved by the hon. Gentleman, would destroy many jobs in our economy.

Village Schools

10. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what educational criteria she uses to assess the case for the retention of small village schools. [7060]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mrs. Cheryl Gillan): The closures of county and voluntary schools are considered on their own merits.

Mr. Tyler: The guidance that the Minister can give to local education authorities of all political colours will be very helpful and I hope that it will be spelt out in detail. May I ask her more specifically for advice on the plight facing Blisland school in my constituency, where the roll fell to such a level that it was no longer educationally or economically viable and the LEA, with the concurrence and support of the Secretary of State, decided that the school should be closed? What advice can the hon. Lady give in the present circumstances, where the school roll is increasing again and the local authority, with cross-party agreement, has decided to review the situation? Will the Secretary of State be prepared to review the closure and retrieve Blisland school? What educational and economic criteria will she need to be persuaded of to establish its future?

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman knows that I am well aware of the situation concerning Blisland school. The Liberal Democrat-controlled council published the proposal to close it as recently as March this year. Her Majesty's inspectorate visited the school, where there were nine pupils and one teacher. We received no representations from the hon. Gentleman about the school. He is now telling me that the Liberal Democrats have changed their minds, which does not surprise me and I am sure does not surprise anybody else. Now that the decision has been taken to close the school, and since the LEA made such a good case for doing so originally, I must advise him that it will be necessary for that local authority to publish fresh proposals to make a case for keeping the school open.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: No doubt my hon. Friend will be pleased to know that those of my village schools that have been assessed in the recent inspection round have had exceptionally good results, co-operate with one another to provide a much broader curriculum and are in every way admirable.

Mrs. Gillan: As usual, I agree with my hon. Friend, who is obviously making a very strong point in favour of good rural schools. Good rural schools are supported by the Government.

School Class Sizes

11. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she plans to take to reduce class sizes in primary schools. [7061]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Decisions about class sizes are a matter for local education authorities and schools.

Mr. Williams: Do the Government now accept what 90 per cent. of parents considered to be self-evident: with a given teacher in a given classroom, the quality of learning and the amount of individual attention given to children's reading, writing and arithmetic are greater in class sizes of 30 rather than 35?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman should refer to the report produced by the Office for Standards in

Education specifically on class sizes. He will find that the chief inspector stated that there was no simple link between class size and quality of teaching and learning. If the hon. Gentleman remains as unconvinced as he looks, he should ponder on the fact that in Hackney, long under Labour control, standards at the Hackney Downs school were so deplorable that the school had to be closed, yet it had only eight pupils to every teacher.

Mrs. Peacock: What positive steps is my right hon. Friend taking to encourage all local education authorities to pass 95 per cent. of the budget to schools so that schools can make decisions on class sizes, which is what they really want to do?

Mrs. Shephard: I should hope that such a policy would be so self-evidently sensible to all properly run LEAs that there would be no need for me to encourage them further.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Has the Secretary of State seen the recently published Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report which illustrates how our international competitors have had a substantial improvement in pupil-teacher ratios, leading to reductions in class sizes? The report also notes that, under three successive Tory Governments, the reverse process has occurred in the United Kingdom, leading to increased class sizes. Given that the Government have appropriated huge parts of Labour party policy in their current Education Bill and given that Her Majesty's chief inspector has admitted the link between smaller class sizes and improved performance at key stage 1, will the Secretary of State now join the Labour party in giving a commitment that, at key stage 1, there will be no class of more than 30?

Mrs. Shephard: Perhaps I may remind the hon. Gentleman that his party's class-envious plans to destroy the assisted places scheme—and, with it, opportunities for able children from less well-off families—to reduce class size would yield one extra teacher for every nine schools. I wonder how he would divide them up.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that, although class sizes clearly have a part to play in the attraction of a school, it is the structure and ethos of the school and the quality of teaching that are far more important to parents. Does she accept that, in many rural schools, it is the quality and ethos of the school and the teaching that are important, and that those are the schools that are attractive to parents and to which they want their children to go?

Mrs. Shephard: Parents are well aware of which schools are popular and successful and willingly choose larger classes if they think those schools will do best for their children.

School Security

12. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what additional financial assistance is being proposed for local education authorities and schools to tackle the problems of school security. [7062]

Mr. Robin Squire: An extra £66 million is being made available for security measures at LEA-maintained and grant-maintained schools over the next three years.

Mr. Turner: I thank the Minister for the answer, but the question is whether that is enough. The Minister will be aware that, following the horrific machete attack at St. Luke's school in my constituency, my local LEA has been actively encouraging schools to draw up school security programmes. To date, the total amount of money that has been identified is in the region of £1 million. The amount of money coming to Wolverhampton as a result of the Government's additional programme is approximately £100,000. It can be clearly seen that that is a tiny amount and just a drop in the ocean.

Madam Speaker: Order. That was another non-question. Perhaps the Minister might try to answer the non-question.

Mr. Squire: I will do my best, Madam Speaker.

We will announce shortly the individual LEA allocations, but even if—for the sake of discussion—I ran with the figure of £100,000 that the hon. Gentleman produced, over three years that would mean some £225,000 from Government, in addition, and I stress that, to the money already being spent on security by schools and LEAs. I do not believe that the country would consider £66 million to be as insignificant a sum as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Standard Spending Assessments

13. **Sir Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received in respect of the method by which the education standard spending assessment is derived. [7063]

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations offering a range of views on possible adjustments to the SSA methodology.

Sir Colin Shepherd: May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to sparsity, which is an important matter in my part of the world? Does he agree that, in a sparsely populated area, it is necessary for a local education authority to maintain a larger number of smaller schools than would be needed in a more densely populated urban area? Small, rural schools cannot achieve the same economies of scale as larger schools. In my county, we have to maintain 5.15 schools per 10,000 of the population, compared to a shire average of 4.86 per 10,000. In my part of the world, it is felt that the sparsity factor is not adequately recognised when the overall figures are considered. Will my hon. Friend ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to go back to the Department of the Environment and the local government associations and review the sparsity factor to ensure that it reflects what is necessary?

Mr. Squire: As my hon. Friend is aware, I recently met representatives of a group of local authorities, including his. We discussed the sparsity factor and related issues.

My hon. Friend is also aware that the sparsity allowance compensates authorities for the additional costs of providing small schools and for extra transport costs in sparsely populated areas. The review recently undertaken did not put forward any robust evidence for increasing the sparsity factor. However, we shall continue to keep the issue under close review.

Mr. Pike: How many local education authorities, if they limited their spending to standard spending assessment levels, would have to reduce their expenditure from what they are spending this year?

Mr. Squire: I obviously cannot answer that now. If the hon. Gentleman tables that question as a written question, I shall provide the answer.

The principle has long existed that local authorities are free to spend more or less than individual SSAs on services. I am pleased that many of them spend more than their SSA on education, but that remains their decision, for which they are accountable to their electors.

Mr. Viggers: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the increase in education provision in Hampshire is fully consistent with the increase in inflation and with the priority that we give to education? It is misleading for Hampshire county council to stir up a writing campaign of complaint against the provision.

Mr. Squire: I can certainly confirm to my hon. Friend that the national increase in SSAs of 3.4 per cent.—3.6 per cent. overall in education services to local authorities—is comfortably ahead of the rate of inflation and of the projected growth in pupil numbers.

Departmental Policy

14. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what account she takes of the relationship between the levels of (a) unemployment and (b) employment in formulating her Department's policy decisions. [7064]

Mr. Forth: The Department's latest assessment shows that our policies are working; employment is rising and unemployment is falling.

Mr. Gapes: If unemployment is falling in the way in which the Minister claims, why are there 800,000 fewer people in employment than when the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) became Prime Minister? Is not the truth that hundreds of thousands of workers are disappearing from the job statistics and that, despite the Government's claims, many people face greater job insecurity as a result of the Government's policies?

Mr. Forth: No. For political purposes, those such as the hon. Gentleman would like people to think that they face greater job insecurity. It is irresponsible of Labour Members to continue trying to plant that idea in people's minds. There is nothing to support that in the relevant statistics on the average length of job tenure or any other issue. The hon. Gentleman seems to imply that the labour force survey figures, endorsed by the International Labour Organisation, no less, are wrong. He cannot mean that, because I am sure that Labour Members all think that ILO-endorsed figures must be the bee's knees. Since they show that unemployment has been falling and employment is rising, I hope that the hon. Gentleman goes off and does more homework.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Irrespective of the relationship between unemployment and employment, does my hon. Friend agree that it would be damaging to unemployment and to employment prospects if this country were to adopt the social chapter or the minimum wage?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is right to remind the House—I do not think we have had the reminder today—that, were this country ever to contemplate signing up to the social chapter or a statutory minimum wage, we would be likely to suffer what our continental partners who signed up to these measures have suffered. They have high and rising unemployment, as opposed to our recent experience which, I am happy to say, is of lower unemployment than most of our direct competitors and partners, and falling unemployment. Any rational man must surely conclude that there is an obvious causal connection between the social chapter and a minimum wage on the one hand and high and rising unemployment on the other.

Mr. Blunkett: I was going to wish Ministers a happy Christmas, but I suspect that the Minister of State would merely shout, "Humbug," in his usual fashion. Why did unemployment triple under this Government without a minimum wage and without the social chapter? On job tenure, why did 52 per cent. of all those who gained a job in the past year return to the unemployment register within a year? Why has the proportion of inactive males increased by 27.3 per cent. in the past five years? Why has there been a drop in the number of males with full-time jobs in the past 12 months? Is this not a Goebbels approach to statistical analysis that tries to pretend that the more inactive people there are in the labour force, and the fewer full-time jobs there are, the more beneficial it is to the nation as a whole? Is that not the real humbug of Christmas in 1996?

Mr. Forth: That proves that the hon. Gentleman's researchers have had to become more ingenious in finding some sort of figure to support his gloomy view of what is going on in this country today. The reason why unemployment rose throughout the advanced and developed countries in the 1980s was partly intensive global competition and—in this country—partly the fact that we inherited a position of grotesque structural overmanning in our industries that had to be dealt with. The Government elected in 1979 dealt with those problems, and that has put us in a competitive position that is the envy of our continental partners and competitors. That is the reality, and I invite the hon. Gentleman to consider it over his, I hope, very happy Christmas.

Sir Donald Thompson: How is it that the Opposition believe the figures when they get worse, but disbelieve them when they get better? Do their prejudices extend

to our service industries, about which they are constantly sniping? *[Interruption.]* Snipe, snipe, snipe. That sector is where new jobs will come from.

Mr. Forth: Yes, I agree, and it is perhaps time that we did some snipe-shooting. My hon. Friend made an important point. The service sector is a vital part of our economy—one that is growing successfully in leisure, tourism and financial services—and it improves our international competitiveness by leaps and bounds. It is putting us in a strong position to export and to attract inward investment. All these factors put together give rise to our optimism and positivism, and lead me to wonder where Opposition Members get their negativism and the gloom and doom that they peddle every time we have Education and Employment questions.

Mr. Beggs: Will the Minister seek co-operation from other Departments and officials throughout the United Kingdom in dealing with planning applications so that the Government's policy of keeping jobs in rural areas can be achieved? Will he request that sympathetic consideration be given to those who want to start new play groups in rural areas?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that important point. I can assure him that we work constantly with our colleagues in the Department of the Environment and in the territorial offices to ensure that all our policies help the rural areas in every possible way and do not hinder them. It is easy—rightly—to become absorbed by the problems of inner cities and we must never forget that the problems of dispersed and remote rural areas are just as serious and deserve every bit of policy attention. We will continue to give that attention.

Assisted Places

15. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to review provision for assisted places in 1997–98. [7065]

Mrs. Gillan: None.

Mr. Hanson: If the Minister has no plans for a review, perhaps she should take time to consider whether any changes should be made. Does she agree that the £140 million that is planned to be spent on subsidising 40,000 people on assisted places schemes next year could be far better spent on reducing class sizes for 400,000-plus five, six and seven-year-olds? Will the Conservative party make time for a review next year and try to take care of the many rather than the few?

Mrs. Gillan: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. Everyone knows that Conservative Members believe that the assisted places scheme offers a valuable choice to many parents throughout the country. The scheme plays an integral part in our policy of choice and diversity. The Labour party's proposals to phase out the assisted places scheme would yield about £5 million in the first year, which could possibly deliver 200 teachers into the system, meaning that the Labour party would weigh the interests of 200 more primary teachers against those of the 10,000 children whom they would deprive of the scheme.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Does my hon. Friend accept that, excellent as the assisted places scheme is, it is still nowhere near as good as the direct grant scheme that it replaced?

Mrs. Gillan: The assisted places scheme is an extremely good scheme, but we all know what happened to the direct grant scheme and who was responsible for abolishing those schools.

Training Opportunities (Young People)

16. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to extend training opportunities for those aged under 25 years. [7066]

Mr. Paice: The White Paper "Learning to Compete", published on 9 December, builds on the exciting range of opportunities for young people. It sets out a learning entitlement up to national vocational qualification level 3, through a choice of routes including national traineeships and further expansion of modern apprenticeships, with special measures for those who need extra help to get started.

Mrs. Fyfe: If the Labour party can guarantee real training with meaningful qualifications for a quarter of a million under-25s, what excuse does the Minister have for the betrayal of under-25s in the past 17 years?

Mr. Paice: The hon. Lady would have done the House a greater service by drawing attention to, and admitting, the fact that Labour party policy is an absolute sham. The Labour party proposes to give people the chance to study only to NVQ level 2, which is equivalent to five GCSEs, when already nearly half our young people achieve that while they are at school. The Labour party is therefore merely extending the opportunity to become semi-skilled, in contrast with our proposals, announced on Monday, which will entitle all young people to study for a level 3 qualification as an entry into higher education or to become a qualified craftsman, technician or supervisor, with a real platform for a future career.

Examination Results

19. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many (a) grant-maintained and (b) local education authority schools are represented in the top 50 state schools measured by A-level results. [7069]

Mrs. Gillan: Thirty of the top 50 schools in England are grant-maintained and 20 are LEA-maintained.

Mr. Spring: Can my hon. Friend confirm that the pattern of GCSE results is similar to that of A-level results in grant-maintained schools, and does she agree that the excellent results from grant-maintained schools vindicate the wide diversity of parents who choose GM schools for their children?

Mrs. Gillan: I can indeed confirm that. The GCSE results tell the same story: half the pupils in GM schools

achieved five good passes at GCSE, compared with 41 per cent. of pupils in local education authority schools. I am delighted that GM schools are achieving such excellent results, not only at A-level but at GCSE and in the national curriculum assessments; they figure strongly both in the top 50 at A-level and in the Office for Standards in Education's list of outstanding schools. They account for a quarter of all schools with sixth forms and three fifths of the top 50 at A-level—and we all know that the Labour party would abolish them.

Mr. O'Hara: The Minister knows that her last statement is erroneous. The presumption behind the question demonstrates the fault of the obsession with league tables. Would it not be more relevant to compare the performance of grant-maintained schools with what they achieved before they were grant-maintained? There is an element of self-fulfilment in the league tables. How many grant-maintained schools are diagnosed as failing and what will the Minister do about them?

Mrs. Gillan: The Labour party's opposition to everything that the Government have done to improve our education system is well known. It opposed league tables and grant-maintained schools and it would abolish assisted places. The performance tables have operated for five years and are respected throughout the education system. The Government will continue to produce performance tables, as we have promised.

BILL PRESENTED

WAR WIDOWS AND PENSIONERS (EQUAL TREATMENT)

Mr. Simon Hughes presented a Bill to end the differential treatment of war widows and war disablement pensioners by local authorities; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 January 1997, and to be printed [Bill 56].

Point of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the understanding that the next financial settlement in Wales will result in at least 1,200 teachers being dismissed, has the Secretary of State for Education and Employment applied to make a statement to the House? If not, why not? Given the serious situation, should she not do so as soon as possible?

Madam Speaker: The answer is no. No Minister has let me know today that they are seeking to make a statement. I cannot help the hon. Gentleman any further.

Fire Safety

3.31 pm

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make further provision for the protection of persons from fire risks; and for purposes connected therewith.

The Bill is far-reaching. I recognise that, in the time available, I shall not be able to cover all its points. I shall try to give a decent summary.

The Keighley mill fire in February 1956 resulted in the death of eight people and led to the Factories Act 1961. The Hendersons department store fire in June 1960 resulted in the death of 11 people and led to the Offices, Shops and Railway Premises Act 1963. The Top Storey club fire in Bolton resulted in 19 deaths and led to greater powers for fire authorities under the Licensing Act 1964. The Rose and Crown fire in Saffron Walden on Boxing day 1969 resulted in 11 deaths and led to hotels and boarding houses being designated under the Fire Precautions Act 1971. The Woolworths store fire in Manchester in 1979 resulted in 12 deaths and led to the Upholstered Furniture (Safety) Regulations 1980. The Bradford football stadium fire in May 1985, in which 58 people died, resulted in the Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987. Finally, the King's Cross rail fire of 1987 resulted in 31 deaths and led to the Fire Precautions (Sub-surface Railway Stations) Regulations 1989.

Those pieces of legislation had one thing in common: they were what is known in the trade as tombstone legislation. People have had to die before action has been taken. I should love to be able to say that I am proposing legislation that will stop tragedies happening rather than legislation as a result of tragedies. Unfortunately, I cannot, because on 6 September 1993, two firemen were killed at Sun Valley Poultry Ltd. in Hereford.

That happened in a former factory that had been turned into a poultry processing plant. Panels had been built round the inside of the building, creating a building within a building. Fire broke through one of those panels. Firefighters who went to fight the fire did not know what was happening in between those panels. The roof burned and collapsed and two firefighters, who were doing the work that they did every day for all the people of this country, were killed. That is one of the reasons why I present the Bill, but there are other reasons.

There was much speculation in 1994 about the weakening of fire safety regulations under the deregulation initiative. I am anxious to ensure that I have cross-party support for the Bill, but it seemed to me, at a time when most people realised the need for greater fire safety, that we were taking forward measures that could cost people's lives. Since then, there seems to have been literally review after review, recommendation after recommendation and report after report. Some the Government have accepted and some they have not, some rightly so. One thing that has become clear as a result of that constant review is that there is a need after more than 25 years to review fire safety legislation.

The Fire Precautions Act 1971 served its purpose well. Most people agree that it was a good piece of legislation, but it did not do what it set out to do. It set out to be an all-embracing Act that would take in every fire safety measure. My Bill would do that. It would consolidate all fire safety legislation. It would replace in part or in total

more than 54 pieces of legislation on the statute book and put fire legislation into one single Bill. So it is both simplifying and, in some respects, deregulatory. I hope that it will receive the support of the House.

My Bill is also progressive and forward-looking. It incorporates many new recommendations that were made as a result of the 1993 Home Office review of the Fire Precautions Act 1971. My Bill supports the Government's view announced in May 1996 that fire safety should in general be treated separately in legislation and that its enforcement should rest principally with fire authorities. Indeed, one of the main intentions of the Bill is to create a one-stop shop for fire safety. The one-stop shop would be the fire authority and the Department responsible would be the Home Office.

The Bill is also designed to complement the Government's proposals on the EC framework workplaces directive. It is designed to be compatible with the directive and to use the same general duty principle and risk assessment approach as do the Government's proposals. The Bill will use risk assessment to determine fire standards, so that the measures taken are appropriate but not excessive. It will be flexible enough to incorporate all future European legislation.

Even more important, for the first time ever in fire safety legislation, the Bill will take into account not just the safety of the public—most fire legislation has taken that into account—but the safety of firefighters and give them some protection. We are currently building in England and Wales—not in Scotland; they seem to have more sense there—gigantic buildings with no compartmentalisation. It seems to be the view of many people that it is acceptable for such places to burn down; that if there is a fire, the fire services should get the people out and let the building burn. That is not acceptable when it results in the death of firefighters. Nor is it acceptable in terms of insurance, because insurance companies have to meet the cost of fires. That means that all of us suffer as we have to pay extra insurance. Furthermore, it is not acceptable in terms of the effect on the environment. Some fires can be devastating to the environment in general. For the first time, the Bill imposes a duty to think not only of the safety of people, but of the safety of premises. It is a genuine fire safety Bill.

I suspect that, if there is any criticism of the Bill, it will be that it has been designed for firefighters. I make no apology for that—firefighters are the people who, year by year, week by week and day by day, put their lives on the line for the rest of us. As far as I am concerned, they are the experts on fire safety, because they are the ones who tackle fires and who know what needs to be done to put fires out.

I make no apology for the fact that the Bill is drafted by firefighters and I hope that hon. Members will accept that firefighters are the best people to talk about fire safety. The Bill enjoys the support of all the fire service organisations represented by the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council for England and Wales, which advises the Home Office on all matters relating to the fire service.

Finally, I repeat that firefighters are the experts on fire safety. Let us put responsibility with the fire service, which is where the majority of the general public already think it lies. Let us make sure that the people who go into fires when we are coming out of them are protected. Let us make sure that we have decent fire safety legislation for the 21st century.

3.40 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I oppose leave being given to bring in the Bill, and I shall explain why.

Fire is a most dreadful, destructive and terrifying force and, in our complex and modern society, we must do all that we can to reduce the prospects of fire. To that end, we have a plethora of fire regulations—25 measures in the past nine years, including an Act of Parliament. There are teams of fire inspectors, spending a total of 1.8 million hours a year enforcing existing regulations. We have smoke detectors, fire alarms and fire stations around nearly every corner. Firemen are poised to respond within seconds to any call. The cost to the taxpayer of that fire operation is £1.38 billion per year and that is a price worth paying.

Yet, in spite of all that and in spite of high public awareness, the number of fires continues to rise. It has risen from 392,000 in 1989 to 411,000 in 1994. None the less, the number of house fires is dropping, because people are taking action to reduce risk, without the need for lengthy, costly, bureaucratic and over-prescriptive regulations. Already European directives in the 1980s have cost industry £10 billion—that is equivalent to 500 new hospitals and no end of lost job opportunities.

The hon. Gentleman's proposal illustrates well the difference between the Labour party's approach and ours. He believes that fire can be outlawed by passing legislation. Legislation, like some elixir, cures all. The Labour party claims that more regulations create more safety, but that does not follow. Take road safety: in spite of the ever increasing number of regulations, nearly 10 people a day are killed on the roads and some 300,000 are injured. Regulations pour in from Europe, on safety in the home, yet in 1994 4,140 adults and children were tragically killed in household accidents. Although no one doubts that the hon. Gentleman has been prompted to seek the leave of the House to bring in his Bill by the highest motives, he is mistaken if he believes that legislation can cure the ills that he describes.

It is worse than that. I suspect that the Bill would create an additional bill in knock-on costs for small businesses. That is the problem with the Labour party. Labour Members do not understand that not only does legislation not solve problems, but additional rules and regulations imposed on industry make us less competitive and cost people jobs. That is why I oppose the Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 125, Noes 40.

Division No. 29] **[3.45 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick	Beggs, Roy
Alexander, Richard	Beith, A J
Ashdown, Paddy	Benn, Tony
Ashton, Joseph	Bennett, Andrew F
Barnes, Harry	Bermingham, Gerald

Betts, Clive
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Donohoe, Brian H
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faulds, Andrew
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Kaufman, Gerald
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rendel, David
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rowlands, Ted
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Wareing, Robert N
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Keith Hill and
Mr. Graham Allen.

NOES

Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Butcher, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Cope, Sir John
Durant, Sir Anthony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'ld)*
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gryffs, Sir Michael
Hannam, Sir John
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Leigh, Edward
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Nicholls, Patrick
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Pawsey, James
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Steen, Anthony
Sweeney, Walter
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wiggin, Sir Jerry

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Devlin and
Mr. Rupert Allason.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. John Heppell, Sir David Knox, Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith, Mrs. Diana Maddock, Mr. Jim Marshall, Mr. Gordon Prentice, Mr. Stanley Orme, Mr. John Austin-Walker, Mr. Joseph Ashton, Mr. Greg Pope, Mr. David Hanson and Mr. Ian Pearson.

Fire Safety

Mr. John Heppell accordingly presented a Bill to make further provision for the protection of persons from fire risks; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 February 1997, and to be printed [Bill 55].

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I understand that the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) has resigned his position as a Minister following the publication of the report of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges. Is it customary or optional for a Member in that position to come to the House and offer an apology or an explanation, or would the Leader of the House offer such an explanation?

Madam Speaker: If the Member concerned wishes to do so, he or she makes an approach to me to make a personal statement. No such approach has been made to me.

European Union

[*Relevant documents: The White Paper on Developments in the European Union, January to June 1996 (Cm 3469); Presidency General Outline for a draft revision of the Treaties; The Commission's Work Programme for 1997: New Legislative Proposals (SEC(96)1819); The Commission's Work Programme for 1997: Political Priorities (COM(96)507); European Community Document No. 10867/96 on the introduction of the euro; European Community Document No. 10893/96 on reinforced convergence procedures and a new exchange rate mechanism; European Community Document No. 10892/96 on a stability pact for ensuring budgetary discipline in stage 3 of EMU; Second and Third Reports from the Select Committee on European Legislation of Session 1996–97 (HC 36-ii and 36-iii); Sixth Report from the Select Committee on European Legislation of Session 1996–97, European Documents on Economic and Monetary Union: the Scrutiny Process (HC 36-vi); Eighth Report from the Treasury Committee of Session 1995–96, The Prognosis for Stage Three of Economic and Monetary Union (HC 283-I and II); Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on European Legislation on 3rd December (HC 136-i); and Minutes of Evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 5th and 9th December (HC 148-i and 148-ii).*]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Anthony Coombs.]*

Madam Speaker: Before we begin, let me inform the House that it has been indicated to me that, today alone, more than 46 Back Benchers wish to speak, and in my judgment a similar number will wish to speak tomorrow. I ask all hon. Members to stay in the House for the remainder of the day and see what their chances are. In such circumstances, I have had to impose a 10-minute limit for Back-Bench speeches.

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Would it be in order for me to ask you whether you would be prepared to refer the situation that has now arisen to the Procedure Committee for further consideration, or whether you would require a Member of Parliament to do that? In a two-day debate, only Front Benchers will be able to develop the argument or answer questions asked by other Members; the rest of us will have no time to develop the argument properly. Moreover, if there are interruptions, we shall not be able to give the information that is requested. I think that the Procedure Committee ought to consider the matter again.

Madam Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that it is only recently that the Procedure Committee has given me authority to impose 10-minute limits on speeches throughout a debate. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would consider asking the Procedure Committee to look into the matter. I take his point very much to heart. I am concerned with the high quality of debate in the House, and I appreciate that, when I have to limit speeches to 10 minutes, we do not get the debate to which we are accustomed here.

3.59 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): Out of deference to the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), I shall probably give way rather less than I sometimes do. The temptation will be for hon. Members to interrupt me, my temptation will be to give way and I should probably use a disproportionate amount of time, but I should like to cover a lot of ground.

This is an important debate, because it comes on the eve of the European summit in Dublin, where the British team—my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary and I—will be defending and advancing British interests in Europe. Our overriding aim at Dublin will be to ensure that the United Kingdom continues to benefit from our membership of the European Union and that we continue to play a major role in moulding that European Union as it evolves as a partnership of nation states. The key issue in addressing those objectives is, where does the national interest lie?

In recent weeks, we have debated the details of the arrangements for economic and monetary union—important details, such as regulations relating to article 109l(4) or the public accounting conventions of France—but those details are symbols, and they are a focus for more deep-rooted anxieties about Britain's future political and economic identity. The real core of the debate is the much wider and more important issue of the United Kingdom's national identity and our future role in the modern world. In my experience, this country returns to agonising about its national identity every few years or so when important occasions arise.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: In the light of what I said earlier, I may give way later, when I get to more specific points.

I hope that, during the next two days of debate, the House can address and allay some of the anxieties about our relationship with Europe. I want to explain how, in my judgment, our political and economic future is bound up with the future of the European Union, and how our negotiations at Dublin and thereafter will be pursuing our national interest.

I hope that we can avoid irrelevancies. There is no Conservative politician in the House who is a federalist; no Conservative politician would accept a European super-state. Every Conservative opposes any suggestion of the creation of a united states of Europe. Treating the debate about economic and monetary union as if it were a debate about the creation of a super-state arouses public fears and deprives the public of sensible information about the issue. *[Interruption.]* We may return to this, but we last debated the matter when we debated the Maastricht treaty, and I responded then to several hon. Friends who intervened.

In my view, fewer and fewer people on the continent see economic and monetary union as a tool for political integration—*[Interruption.]* Well, if they do, we do not agree with them. If they do, I do not think that most of the younger generation of politicians on the continent agree with them either—by "younger", I mean people of my age and below. We have to judge the discussions on economic and monetary union in terms of British economic interests and Britain's role in the European Union.

[Mr. Clarke]

The United Kingdom is and must continue to be an extremely influential player on the world stage, but our future national identity and future international influence will be secured and strengthened by our retaining our position as a major European power.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary will be debating the framework for political co-operation between European Union members in the House tomorrow. The Government remain firmly in favour of the approach taken in the Maastricht treaty, where co-operation over matters such as foreign and security policy and justice and home affairs is dealt with on an intergovernmental basis—the so-called pillared approach.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Hear, hear.

Mr. Clarke: I have always said, and my hon. Friend has always said—I have said it in the House and outside—that that pillared approach is and was the best feature of the Maastricht treaty. I will not read out my own speech as reported in *Hansard* at column 1108 on 27 January 1993.

The pillared approach opens the way for closer co-operation between member states on issues such as foreign policy and home affairs, but on the basis of unanimous decision taking by independent nation states and without the involvement of Community institutions such as the European Parliament and the European court. I have always said in particular that the British armed forces would never be committed to any foreign policy initiative unless the British Parliament supported it. The Government will ensure that it stays that way.

On the other hand, I have always said that the weakest part of the Maastricht treaty was the artificial timetable for economic and monetary union. Those have always been my views, and they remain my views.

Our economic interests are inextricably linked to our position in Europe. British economic success is the result of a combination of three factors: first, the Government's successful macro-economic policies; secondly, the Government's supply-side reforms, which have given us some of the most flexible products and labour markets in the industrialised world; and, thirdly, our access to the European single market, which is our biggest marketplace and the largest open market in the world.

The combination of those three factors is crucial to our future prosperity and success. All three of them lead to job creation, and make Britain a magnet for overseas investors looking for a foothold in the European market.

Mr. Marlow: No one has suggested that the single market is at risk. My right hon. and learned Friend said this morning that the single currency is no threat to nation states. Why does he think that the vast majority of the Conservative party is against the single currency? It is precisely because it would be the end of the nation state.

Mr. Clarke: I know that my hon. Friend holds that belief firmly, so I realise that for him it is a straightforward question. If I shared his belief, I would be against economic and monetary union. We need to have a debate. I do not hold that belief, and I do not think that such a belief is the be-all and end-all of debate.

Other economic issues are involved, and we must consider the impact on the single market of the creation of a euro zone in the middle of it—I am glad that my hon. Friend and I agree on the importance of the single market. The Government's economic policy consists of getting right our macro-economic policy, our supply-side, micro-economic measures and the nature of the single market in which we operate and our influence on it.

The British Government played a leading role in creating the single market, and in seeking to complete it. When we signed the Single European Act, we entered into a single market that had institutions and rules. We have always accepted that a huge single market requires institutions and rules. We need to ensure that those rules are obeyed by every member state, and that the single market continues to provide the right climate for a competitive, free market economy such as ours to succeed.

That is one of the main reasons why I attend Economic and Finance Council and European Council meetings. It is in our national interest, and one of the key British objectives in our detailed negotiations on the euro zone as it emerges, to ensure that the right climate exists for our competitive position.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): How do we display our influence in economic affairs if the European central bank makes the basic economic decisions, and under the Maastricht treaty we are not allowed even to make representations to the bank? Is that not a collapse of sovereignty and democracy?

Mr. Clarke: The European central bank will be an independent bank, such as that which they have had for years in the United States of America and they had in the Federal Republic of Germany. It will be responsible for monetary policy decisions. Questions of taxation, public spending and priorities and budget setting of the kind that I presented to the House two weeks ago would remain the responsibility of the nation state. I shall return to that subject in a moment.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): We are anxious to know the Government's position. This morning, the Chancellor said that he supported the principle of a single currency. Is that the position of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and the Government?

Mr. Clarke: I do not believe that I said that. I support having the option. I am answering questions from those who believe that one of the options would rule out the existence of the nation state. I do not agree with that, but I have made it clear that I am sympathetic to the idea of economic and monetary union. I am trying to explain why I believe that the Government's policy of retaining the choice in both directions, and exercising it responsibly in the national interest, is what we are all about. I am seeking to define the national interest in relation to economic policy.

Mr. Brown: The Chancellor said this morning that he had no objection, in principle, to a single currency. Will he answer a second question? A number of Conservative Members have said that they will stand under a different manifesto, and that they will oppose a single currency in principle. Has the Cabinet agreed a dispensation for them?

Mr. Clarke: I shall be deterred by that irrelevance for only a few moments. I have here a list of 50 members of

the parliamentary Labour party who, in July this year, put out a document opposing the whole idea of a single European currency. When we discussed Maastricht, Labour was against having an opt-out. At the last election, the Labour party's policy was to bind ourselves by treaty without a choice to a single European currency. We have a clear policy, on which we shall stand at the next election. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman has his answer, and he knows perfectly well what our policy is.

Let us consider the Government's economic aims, which, unlike those of the Opposition, are clear. All Conservatives want a deregulated market economy in Europe. We are all vehemently against the social chapter, no one more vehemently than me. We all want subsidiarity to be respected to the full in the single market. We can accept no question of Government or Parliament giving up control of either public spending or taxation. But we have many allies on those points in the European Councils that I attend. The Germans are probably our strongest supporters on deregulation, subsidiarity and national control of taxation.

The British Government insist that the European market must continue to be based on competitive free market principles and free trade. British membership of the EU was extremely important in shaping the European contribution to the successful completion of the last general agreement on tariffs and trade round. At this very moment, while we have this debate, at the first ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Singapore, we are pushing forward our free trade agenda. In Singapore, we the British are fending off the protectionist instincts that some of our trading partners would like to introduce into the European position.

It is against that background of the clarity on the Government Benches of our key interest in the nature of the single market that we have to consider our role in negotiations about a possible future single currency.

The European countries committed to joining a single currency are our nearest neighbours. They are the market for nearly 60 per cent. of our exports of goods. Our companies are big investors in their companies. When our continental neighbours do badly, we slow down. When they do well, we prosper. That is the economic reality. That is why we must do everything we can to ensure that, if economic and monetary union goes ahead with any member states in membership, it has to be a success.

The United Kingdom ought to punch its weight inside the EU. We have shaped the rules in the single market, to the benefit of everyone in Europe. We should have the self-confidence to believe that we can do the same on the single currency if we stay at the table.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I understand very well that the Chancellor is blind to all the evidence of the federal thrust on the continent of Europe, but he is at least, or so he tells us, concerned about the sustainability of any euro currency that emerges, and totally opposed to finagling with the criteria.

That being so, what has the Chancellor to say about the evidence of finagling on the other side, and in particular of the Commission accepting the French Government's transfer of the France Telecom pension fund into their account, so that they can reduce their borrowing requirement by half of 1 per cent.? The Chancellor knows that there are half a dozen other examples as well. According to his own criteria, he should be saying now that he will not join a fiddled currency.

Mr. Clarke: I have been debating the fear of a European super-state with the right hon. Gentleman in one way or another for about 25 years now, and we have always disagreed on that. It has not happened yet, and I do not think that it will happen, either. For the umpteenth time, I am against it.

Mr. Norman Lamont (Kingston upon Thames): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: No.

On the second point, I disapprove of the transfer to the French Government of payments for the pensions liabilities of France Telecom being regarded as acceptable—the only difference that it has made. As I shall explain, that one transfer, which everyone knows about, does not affect one's basic judgment about convergence. I, along with most other people, would disregard it when it came to making the key judgment in the end, and I am sure that all the other member states will as well.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: With respect, I must be allowed to make a little progress. I should like to go on to the negotiations. I will return to convergence.

Our strongest card in the discussions on economic and monetary union is the British option that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister negotiated at Maastricht. The House needs to debate how and when to exercise that option. Whenever the time for decision comes, the answer must depend on a balanced judgment of possible advantages and disadvantages. Nothing in this world is ever going to be black and white, but, when we do exercise our option, essentially it will be a judgment for the House to make about the upside and the downside, and we will probably find that they present themselves in a combination that we should begin to analyse at this stage of the debate.

Mr. Lamont *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend would allow me to move on.

I understand how strongly some Members feel about the federal united states of Europe and so on, and we all understand the difference of opinion on that issue, but I should like to move on to what might be the advantages and disadvantages of a single currency. It is time that, as a House, we debated what we perceive the arguments on both sides to be, because that is the balance that we are going to have to strike.

Let me first consider—I stress that I am coming to the possible disadvantages—what the possible advantages of a single currency are. Why are we going to Dublin at all and taking part in the discussion? Why did we leave an option open at all at Maastricht, and why did the Labour party say that it would sign up there and then, and enter into a treaty commitment to take advantage of economic and monetary union?

[Mr. Clarke]

If EMU can be made to work, it would eradicate exchange rate movements, which can disrupt trade and have disrupted trade in our recent history. We have done well in the past two or three years partly because we have had a reasonably stable exchange rate, but our comparative success is tending to strengthen the pound. Exporting industrialists have already begun to voice concerns about strong upward movements, which obviously happen when we have a floating currency.

Against a weak euro of non-convergent economies, for example, the pound outside could strengthen a lot or it could simply fluctuate widely. Inside a strong EMU, countries would engage in straight competition, undistorted by the foreign exchange markets.

EMU would also reduce transaction costs, making it easier for smaller businesses to enter into and compete in the European market. The members of a strong euro zone would also expect to enjoy lower interest rates, both short and long term, based on the financial strength and reputation of the bloc. Countries with a history of devaluation or bursts of inflation pay a lasting premium in terms of higher interest rates, as we in Britain know only too well.

Mr. Lamont *rose—*

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham) *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: Let me finish the advantages, and then I will give way.

Finally, a single currency will make comparisons of prices and wages across member states direct and stark—they would all be denominated in the same terms. That will expose industry in member countries to more intense direct competition with one another, which could reinforce the desirable pressure on industry and commerce in all member states to become ever more efficient and competitive. It would speed up the drive towards competitiveness.

In that way, EMU could help member economies to rise to the real global challenges of the next 10 years. Every member state in Europe must contemplate the need to be able to compete with the economic might of Japan and of the United States of America, and with the increasing strength of the south-east Asian economies and Latin America. That is one of the European problems, and EMU could speed up that drive, making the core economies competitive.

Therefore, if a single currency could be made to work, it is even arguable—no more than that—that we might benefit more from it than most other aspiring member states. British business is already seriously competitive. Removing exchange rate risk would open up our markets further and provide tremendous opportunities for British business.

We in Britain have already taken the necessary steps to strengthen our private sector and to make our labour markets more flexible. Other countries in Europe are now realising that they must follow the lead that we have been giving for the past 15 years and more. If France and Germany were to fail to restructure their labour markets, for example, they would find it very difficult to compete with the British economy within a single currency and a euro zone.

Mr. Redwood: Does my right hon. and learned Friend believe that it is better for France to close factories because she cannot compete within the current exchange rates? Does he believe that it is better to have massive Budget cuts and damaging cuts in public services than to have a flexible exchange rate? Is not part of the genius of the current British economic policy and recovery the fact that we have flexible exchange rates and interest rates suited to our needs?

Mr. Clarke: I believe that it is in the interests of France to tackle her excessive fiscal deficit and bring public finances back under control. If my right hon. Friend were a Frenchman, he would agree with that. He has always agreed with me in that regard in respect of the British Government. I do not think that the French should go in for competitive devaluation or start believing that devaluation is a way out of making the necessary structural changes.

When my right hon. Friend and I were in government together, we never thought that we should duck structural changes or deliberately devalue the currency in order to avoid making those changes. The pace at which France tackles its fiscal problems is a matter for the French Government, who have to decide their own priorities. It is their duty as a sovereign nation state to tackle that. However, I do not think that comments on their methods are germane to today's debate.

Let me turn to the possible disadvantages of EMU and the reasons why that the question must be kept open. That is why we have adopted the most sensible policy. As I have just said, the intense competition which could be one of the key advantages of a single currency could also be its downfall. Countries that cannot be guaranteed to stay competitive or are not sufficiently flexible to respond to shocks in other ways than devaluation should not join EMU.

Any attempt to fudge the criteria to admit such countries would not be in the real interests of those countries, and could be disastrous for the rest of the EU, which would have to suffer the consequences. I have always acknowledged that there are possible disadvantages of membership of EMU. That is why I have always argued for the option. I may have admitted that I was attracted to it in principle, but I have also said that I could see myself being on the side of those who have argued that we should not join.

One of the key risks to the whole enterprise must be the possibility that it is set up on the basis of political compromise rather than economic judgments. The consequences of a euro zone which was badly put together, or which contained seriously non-convergent countries, would be extremely damaging to all member states of the European Union. No stability pact, no matter how strict, and no matter how dire the punishment for transgressions, could hold such a euro zone together.

If EMU is entered into by nation states that are not truly competitive with the others, or which are too inflexible in their economic structures to respond to pressures in other ways than by devaluation, it will set up insupportable and damaging strains.

When we get there, we shall also have to consider not only the economic arguments, but what EMU implies about the political future of the European Union. As I have said several times already, I do not believe EMU will lead to a European super-state. If I did, I would not contemplate Britain joining it. However, we need to satisfy ourselves about the intentions of our EU partners.

At the end of the day, even if the single currency system is well set up and we believe that it will work for Europe, even if the convergence criteria have been respected properly and in full, we can still ask whether it is right for Britain in economic and political terms. That is the value of our opt-out.

Mr. Lamont: As my right hon. and learned Friend is so adamant that monetary union will not lead to political union, will he address the fact that most of our partners in Europe—certainly the Germans—seem to believe that? The chief economist of the Bundesbank has said:

"there is no example in history of a lasting monetary union that was not linked to one state."

The president of the Bundesbank said:

"A European currency will lead to member-nations transferring their sovereignty over financial and wage policy as well as in monetary affairs. It is an illusion to think that states can hold onto their autonomy over taxation policies."

Our partners believe that; surely it must be addressed.

Mr. Clarke: Hans Tietmeyer does not speak for Germany. It is no good—*[Interruption.]* I agree with Hans Tietmeyer on large parts of the argument, but I do not believe him if he made that statement.

Putting together the comments of Hans Tietmeyer and one member of the Bundesbank council and saying that therefore all the Germans and all our partners believe such a thing is, with the greatest respect to my right hon. Friend, a non sequitur. There are a variety of opinions across western Europe. He has probably had the opportunities that I have had of hearing Helmut Kohl say frequently enough that he is not in favour of a united states of Europe or a federal super-state.

Mr. Lamont *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Clarke: It is no good him shaking his head. No doubt we will find next that the state president of the Bank of Baden-Württemberg has said something different.

I said that some people who attend the Dublin summit may believe that EMU is primarily an instrument for achieving closer political integration, but I do not believe that the majority of politicians from the other states do. I do not believe that the Gaullists of France believe that they are submerging the nation state of France in economic and monetary union, yet the French are the biggest, strongest advocates of economic and monetary union in Europe. Some of them advocate it for reasons that I do not share, but it is not the reason that my right hon. Friend fears.

Having for the first time had the opportunity to set out in this way what are in my opinion the advantages, I turn to the disadvantages, so that the House might concentrate on what matters. How do we believe that the national interest should best be judged when we come to make the decision on the option that we have safeguarded for four years? I turn to the question of convergence, which is at the root of many of the present problems.

If economic and monetary union goes ahead, it is in our interest to ensure that it does so on a timetable and a basis that can be sustained whether we join it or not. I am one of those who, like Theo Waigel, the German Finance Minister, my direct opposite number who first used the phrase that I use frequently, believes that convergence is more important than the timetable. I can reassure the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) that I mean genuine convergence. The key is whether the countries wishing to join will be able to achieve genuine and sustainable convergence.

The Maastricht treaty sets out a list of nominal convergence criteria that should be used as a first measure of whether a country is a credible candidate for economic and monetary union. I believe that the criteria are sensible and should be rigorously applied. They take as their underlying principles our own guiding principles on macro-economic policy.

It is not surprising that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) took part in the negotiations on the convergence criteria, because they concentrate on low inflation and sound public finances. He was one of the architects of those conditions, which are essential for economic success. I believe that they are very necessary conditions that any country must fulfil before even contemplating membership of a single currency.

Countries joining the euro zone must not just meet the convergence criteria in a particular year. That is one reason why a particular transaction, however large and startling, proves nothing. I would certainly not regard it as any evidence that France was achieving anything that mattered. Convergence means demonstrating a credible commitment to durable and sustainable convergence. That is the key; that is what the treaty says; and that is the basis on which decisions on who should join EMU must be taken. It is certainly the basis on which the Government will take their decisions and cast any votes that we come to cast at the relevant time.

I am trying to explain that I am one of those who are genuinely waiting to decide. That is sometimes a difficult position to occupy in the House, but I think it is firmly occupied by at least 70 per cent. of the British public who are trying to follow this debate. My judgment will depend on the actual circumstances we face at the time, and where the national interest lies. It is a parody of my views and those of many others to imply that I think that the UK should join EMU this weekend.

We need to have the full picture and to debate all the issues before we take such a key decision on the economic future of our country. We have not taken all the tough steps that we have to make Britain the enterprise centre of Europe simply to make a premature and superficial judgment of our role in or out of any euro zone.

The British opt-out is described as a wait-and-see policy—a balancing act. In my opinion, those are dismissive terms for an extremely sensible policy that is, in fact, the only policy that is in the best interests of the British. That policy puts us in a position that a number of our European partners clearly envy. Unlike them, we have kept solely in the hands of the British Government, the British Parliament and the British people the ultimate decision about whether or not we will join EMU.

Those who would like us to exercise our opt-out now are asking us to throw away that hard-won advantage. Presumably they would say that a referendum is no

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consolation, and that they would set aside the views of the British public, because they wish to say no now, in the same way that they would say no whatever the outcome of the referendum to which we are committed.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said at the weekend, to throw away our hard-won advantage would be

"fleeing the field when the game is still to be played".

We have everything to gain and nothing to lose from staying in the game. It is only now, as practical preparations get going and as a picture begins to emerge of who will be part of the project and how it will be run, that we are enjoying the full value of our opt-out.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: I must get on, because otherwise I will take up a disproportionate time.

We are determining—for example, in the discussions on the regulations which most of us have now forgotten and which originally gave rise to the demand for this two-day debate; although I am glad we have moved on to the wider scene—the terms on which any British Government might, at any time in the foreseeable future, join EMU. That is why the legislation is so important. We are also helping to shape the rules that will govern the system, whether we are a member of it or not.

Our EMU option is no soft option, and I am better placed than most to know that because I have been attending the Council of Ministers since 1979. It takes a lot of hard work and a lot of nitty-gritty practical negotiations with our European partners on the part of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

That would not be made any easier if partners round the table suspected that it was just an academic exercise for the UK. It is true that we could still sit at the negotiating table even if we had opted out. We could still argue in logic that our national interests enabled us to play a full part, but the reality is that the influence at the negotiating table of those countries likely to be out for the foreseeable future is far, far less than that of the lead contenders for membership.

Keeping our options open is much more than just a bargaining ploy. It is leaving us with a genuine choice to exercise at the right time in our national interest, and meanwhile keeping our national power to influence the course of great events at the negotiating table.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The Chancellor is making a clear case for monetary union and the circumstances in which the Government would not join. The Government would not join if they thought there was a political fudge, and, of course, if the United Kingdom had not qualified. What would be the Government's position if it were agreed that there was no political fudge and the United Kingdom had qualified? Will the British Government recommend that we enter in the first tranche?

Mr. Clarke: I hope that the logic of my speech makes it clear that, if—as events turn out—those possible advantages that I have described strongly outweighed the possible disadvantages that I described, I would probably be in favour of joining. When I say that I retain the right to wait and decide, I have made it clear that that decision could go in either direction so far as I am concerned. I am not saying that I would necessarily say no, but I tend to emphasise that I could probably say no because that is always found more surprising by my auditors. It is obvious that I could also say yes, because I think we might lose if we stayed out of a properly functioning economic and monetary union.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: Before I give way again, I should like to explain why we cannot sensibly decide now. Apart from the matters that I have already mentioned, there are far too many uncertainties about the shape of the euro zone and how it will function. No one can yet say for certain when or if EMU will happen. It would be foolish to ignore the huge political capital and practical effort that is being invested in the project by the other member states of the European Union.

We do not know which countries are likely to be in the first wave if and when it goes ahead. We do not know how much economic convergence will have been achieved, how strictly the criteria will have been adhered to, and how far participants will have achieved the necessary flexibility in their markets to deal with, for example, differing levels of structural unemployment. We do not even have enough detail on how the European central bank or the single monetary policy will operate. We also need to consider how relations with those who remain outside the euro zone will be handled by those inside it.

We need to consider the implications for the enlargement of the European Union. It is far too soon to determine the overall balance of advantage for the City and for British business in general. Those issues will all have a significant impact on the relative advantage of being in or out. Whatever we decide—in or out—EMU will affect us. We must stay involved and ensure that British interests are protected and advanced.

We have already made major advances in negotiations. We played a critical role in the original design of economic and monetary union back in 1991, when my right hon. Friends the Members for Witney (Mr. Hurd) and for Kingston upon Thames took part in the negotiations. The British negotiators took the key role in ensuring that the European central bank would be independent, that price stability would be its goal, that convergence criteria would apply and that only genuinely convergent countries would go ahead to join stage 3.

By staying involved since 1991, we have continued to exercise a key influence. My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames put the relations between ins and outs firmly on the agenda when other member states were seeking to avoid it. Recently, we have ensured that the so-called ERM 2 remains voluntary. We have agreed the terms, subject to our parliamentary reserve, of regulations on the continuity of contracts after a single currency. That is important for the City of London, as I explained to the House last week.

Those are just some concrete examples of how staying involved in the preparations for EMU has already proved, and will continue to prove, the best way to protect British interests.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): As my right hon. and learned Friend knows only too well, we stated in the Maastricht treaty that, legally, we would never prevent the other member states from going ahead. Thereby we sold a pass.

However, can my right hon. and learned Friend explain how we can be said to be negotiating at the table when we have specifically excluded ourselves from discussions on the single currency at the intergovernmental conference, unlike those at the European Monetary Institute, in which we are engaged in the preparations? Will my right hon. and learned Friend explain the distinction between those two situations? How can we be negotiating on something that we have ruled ourselves out of?

Mr. Clarke: With the greatest respect, my hon. Friend is getting himself into some confusion. It is true that, in the original treaty, we are committed not to seek to obstruct the progress of those member states that wish to proceed to economic and monetary union. It would clearly be unproductive to do so, and, anyway, the treaty is so constructed that it is not possible to vote to do so in any meaningful fashion at any time.

Economic and monetary union is not being raised at the intergovernmental conference. All the member states have agreed that it is not on the agenda. The two are separate items at the summit tomorrow. No discussions are going on about economic and monetary union from which the British Government have excluded ourselves. I am seeking to ensure not only that we do not exclude ourselves, but that we continue to punch our weight on our behalf, in our interests, when we take part in the discussions.

The immediate issue for Finance Ministers tomorrow night on the eve of Dublin will be the stability pact. The stability pact seeks to give practical effect to our existing treaty commitments to pursue sensible economic policies and avoid unsustainable deficit financing. It is all about ensuring that convergence is sustainable and durable—that is important to members of all parties. It is worth making it clear precisely why we need a stability pact.

In today's global financial markets, any nation state that fails to keep Government borrowing under control is rapidly punished by those deregulated markets as the interest rates it has to pay to finance its debts rise. In an EMU, if any one member state gets itself into fiscal difficulties or debt problems, all member states may be punished by the markets. All EMU members may have to pay the penalty of higher interest rates exacted by the financial markets for one member's irresponsible policies. Any country that was a close trading partner of the EMU bloc would have a very close interest in the stability of that bloc for its own economic prosperity.

That is why the Maastricht treaty envisages fines for countries in the single currency that run excessive deficits and which not only incur a deficit but fail to take any effective action to get it down again. The current discussions on the so-called stability pact are about how to determine such fines and when to impose them. In my view, it is important to get these rules right.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): Those who favour a single European currency are in the habit of pointing to the United States as an example of where such a currency operates, but the United States does not have a stability pact. The state of California—which produces about 12 per cent. of the GDP of the United States—very nearly went bankrupt, as did the city of New York, but there was never any suggestion that the Federal Reserve or the US Government should step in. Why does Europe need a stability pact, except as part of a bureaucratic, socialist, centralising, federalist state?

Mr. Clarke: The United States of America is not a partnership of independent nation states of the kind we are contemplating. As I have been emphasising throughout most of my speech, most of the analogies with the United States are, in my opinion, substantially wide of the mark, both politically and economically.

There is absolutely no suggestion of the European central bank stepping in to rescue any member state from the financial consequences of its own fiscal indiscipline. That is not what we are contemplating. There is a no-bail-out clause in the treaty that expressly stops one country bailing out another. We are talking about putting pressure on a sovereign nation state to take the necessary action in the interests of the EMU group—to which, by then, it will belong—to get its fiscal affairs back under control so that the markets give the benefits of membership to all EMU members. Those rules must be right.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way in a moment, but I wish to continue my comments on the stability pact.

We cannot have a set of rules so rigid and inflexible and fines so draconian that every fiscal problem is turned into a crisis. That is the view that I have been taking, and many right hon. and hon. Members will be relieved to know that that is probably the only substantial matter that I shall be discussing in depth over the next two or three days.

But while I am against inflexible rules and draconian penalties, we cannot have a set of commitments so vague that they are more often broken than met. In particular, we need to retain an element of flexibility and political discretion over the whole process. That is the way in which Ministers such as myself, who believe that it is the right way, are steadily taking the discussion.

The other part of the stability pact is making all EU members submit convergence reports on how they are managing their economies. In the European single market—whether or not we have EMU—all countries share an interest in promoting macro-economic stability. Surveillance provides a mechanism for this, and it is now a part of the international financial scene in the modern world.

The British Government believe in international and mutual surveillance of economic performance. We have signed up to independent examination of our economic health by the International Monetary Fund, the

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Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the G7, as well as the EU. The UK is a role model in the provision of open, up-to-date and independent statistical information on the progress of our economy. I have published the IMF article IV report on its annual surveillance of the UK, and I am the first British Chancellor ever to do so.

All member states agreed to produce convergence reports when they signed up to the Single European Act, and we agreed to that when we signed it as a Government led by my noble Friend Baroness Thatcher. The United Kingdom has always produced the reports scrupulously, while other member states sometimes produce out-of-date reports or reports thin on information.

Making the reports compulsory is a very sensible idea, but I am determined to ensure—I give this undertaking again to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and to others among my right hon. and hon. Friends—that there is nothing in the regulations on the stability pact that gives rise to any possibility that the monitoring could have binding legal consequences for the UK if we remained outside economic and monetary union.

We have been in favour of the principles of the stability pact all along. By staying involved in negotiating the details, I intend to ensure that, when the time comes to agree it, it will be a system that a future British Government can sign up to.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): Can my right hon. and learned Friend explain to the House how, if a country exceeds its stipulated budget deficit and consequently has a relatively weak economy, that will be improved by a fine? Was not the demand for reparations from Germany after the first world war utterly disastrous, and did it not lead to Germany borrowing more money to comply? Would it not be a system of paying tribute to a superior power—the European Union?

Mr. Clarke: If I may say so, my hon. Friend warmed to his argument. He began with a good argument, with which I have some sympathy, and I can reassure him that we are not contemplating anything on the scale of reparations or penalties about which the country can do nothing and which are a burden placed on it for the misdeeds of a former Government.

When we helped to put the provisions in the Maastricht treaty, I am sure that we had in mind the possibility of penalties as a last-resort deterrent to give some added determination to a Government and a Parliament to take effective action to remedy their fiscal deficit. Not to have any deterrent in prospect could lead to some countries constantly expecting to be forgiven extremely slow progress towards fiscal health.

In the negotiations, I have been against those who want automaticity and rapid timetables for the penalties and who think that it gives credibility to the system to show the markets that huge penalties would fall on countries suffering fiscal difficulties. I quite agree that John Maynard Keynes would be spinning in his grave if he was told that the solution to a country getting into serious fiscal deficit problems was to impose on it a fine equivalent to the cost of our bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis.

We are negotiating something that, like all the best deterrents, would not be used but would reinforce the political will of a Government to take the necessary action to get back into conformity with their treaty commitments.

To join or not to join is ultimately a political decision. Britain's interests will dictate which way our decision goes. To rush into a premature decision, to extract ourselves from the debate about Britain's future, would be, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister put it, "a dereliction of responsibility".

It is entirely right that the House should be debating the Government's policy on Europe over the next two days. We spend too little time debating these matters in the House. I hope that this debate will be part of the process of defining where we believe our national interests lie and determining the true balance of advantages and risks that we face, so that we can help the British public to form their views.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay) *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: The key question for the country is, who do we want sitting in the chair at the negotiations? Tomorrow we go to Dublin. It remains to be decided who goes to Amsterdam in six months' time. The right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) has a simplified approach of not exercising or having an option on the single currency. I know whom I would prefer to go to Amsterdam, when faced with the choice of the man who negotiated our option on EMU, or the man who says that he would never be isolated in Europe.

Over the years, I have sat many times alongside my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister negotiating at the big tables, not just at the European Council but at G7 meetings. He is a master of the art of small negotiation; that is why he came back with a triumph from Maastricht. When I look across the House, as I sometimes do, at the polished public image and public relations shallowness of the Leader of the Opposition and listen to the shadow Chancellor and the shadow Foreign Secretary, I know which team I prefer. In my judgment, the leaders of Europe would eat the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen alive. They would not be so much turkeys dressed for Christmas as a prawn cocktail before tea for the great statesmen of Europe.

When the time comes, it must be a Conservative Government who consider the issues coolly and come to the right decision for Britain. So long as this party remains in power, the people of Britain can be sure of one thing: we will decide at the right time, for the right reasons; and our decision will be entirely determined by the interests of the United Kingdom.

4.50 pm

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): The first question that came into the minds of Conservative Members when the Chancellor was asking who they would want to represent them at Amsterdam was whether they would want him to. When he set out the advantages and disadvantages of being inside a single currency; set out, with enthusiasm, what he believed were the principal advantages of a single currency; and said that Britain might get some of the biggest advantages from the lower interest rates that could result from a single currency, he spoke with enthusiasm, passion and conviction. But I kept asking

myself whether he spoke for the Conservative party and for the Government. Does he, week to week, continue to speak for the Prime Minister on those vital issues?

The problem was summed up when the Chancellor said that the policy of the Government had the support of 70 per cent. of the population and there were jeers from Conservative Members. We know exactly what Conservative Members think of that policy. As we had jeers when the Chancellor talked of the advantages of the single currency and cheers when the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) put the disadvantages, we know why the Government were so anxious to avoid a vote on a take note motion after this debate and why the Prime Minister had to admit on Sunday that divisions in the Conservative party were damaging the national interest.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I do not know whether to take a Euro-sceptic, a Euro-enthusiast or what. I shall take the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh).

Mr. Leigh: It is almost certain that Britain will meet the Maastricht economic criteria at the appropriate time. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that it is still Labour party policy to commit the nation to join the single currency in that event, and therefore confirm that, by voting Labour, people will vote to abolish the pound?

Mr. Brown: I will come to the hon. Gentleman's point. We will make the decision in the national economic interest and I will lay out the factors that we will consider. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman disparages what I am saying, but that is the policy of the Chancellor of the Exchequer as well. Today, the hon. Gentleman expresses himself as opposing the Opposition; on Friday, he was all over the airwaves saying that the Chancellor and the Prime Minister were defying the will of the majority of the Conservative party. That is the current state of the Conservative party.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover) *rose—*

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I do not know whether to give way to the hon. Member with the Union Jack tie or the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw).

Mr. Shaw: Can the right hon. Gentleman say whether it is still Labour party policy, as written in its policy documents of the past year, that the convergence criteria must be applied flexibly? Is its policy still to fudge the convergence criteria or has it moved from its original policy document?

Mr. Brown: The word "flexible" is not used in our policy document. If the hon. Gentleman wants to read it out, let him please do so.

Mr. Shaw: My understanding is that—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] If the right hon. Gentleman reads "A New Economic Future for Britain" published by the Labour party in June 1995, he will see on page 23 the words:

"Convergence must be based on improving levels of growth and employment, and not just on monetary objectives alone. That is why we have long argued that the convergence criteria must be applied flexibly."

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman mentions employment and growth—exactly issues that we believe should be taken into account. The hon. Gentleman was trying to suggest that we intended to fudge the public spending guidelines. I had better deal with this now. We have always said, first, that we see substantial benefits in the principle. We have always said, secondly, that the decision should be made in the national economic interest. We have said, thirdly, that employment criteria—the real condition of the economy—have to be taken into account and, fourthly, that there must be a test of public opinion. That is a fair way of approaching the issue.

Mr. Richards: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall make some progress and then give way to some hon. Members. *[Interruption.]* The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury is shouting. Perhaps he will answer when he replies to the debate why he has been put up to answer the debate by the Chancellor when he said on the Frost programme only a few weeks ago, "I am a Euro-sceptic. I cannot support the principle of economic and monetary union." Why has he been put up to close the debate and give a position that is diametrically opposite to that of the Chancellor?

Mr. Richards: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I will give way once more and then I shall move forward.

Mr. Richards: Does the right hon. Gentleman have any objection in principle to a single European currency?

Mr. Brown: I have said exactly what is the case. We see substantial benefits in principle in a single currency, but the decision must be made in the national economic interest. We must take into account the advantages and disadvantages of being in, but also the advantages and disadvantages of being out. We must take a decision when we know the full economic information and can make an assessment of it. If the hon. Gentleman disagrees with me on that, he disagrees with the Prime Minister because that is the position that the Prime Minister laid out on Sunday.

I shall examine point by point the important decisions that will be made this weekend in Dublin and the Conservative party's position on them. The Chancellor did not deal with those important issues. I shall state the Labour party's position. We will show issue by issue that Conservative divisions are denying us the unity that is necessary, and therefore damaging the national interest on these matters.

The Chancellor tried to take comfort from what he said were divisions in the Labour party on a single currency. Let me give him a challenge. Let him do what the Labour party did and put his policy to his party membership, including its proposals on Europe, a commitment to the benefits that we see of a single currency, and the need to make the decision in the national interest and to consult the public. Let him see what the result is. Judging by his speech this afternoon, I doubt that the Chancellor will be able to guarantee a majority not just in his party but among his Back Benchers for his position, and perhaps not even a majority in the Cabinet. Who is divided on the issue of Europe?

[Mr. Brown]

The Chancellor presented a theoretical case for being inside a single currency. The fact is that decisions are being made every week in Europe on these issues, and Conservative Members know that. The Chancellor concentrated, as he has done in our two previous exchanges, more on the decisions that have not been made, not yet been made or will be made later, for which he wants discretion from the House, than on the decisions that are being made.

In this two-day debate, we must face up to the decisions that have been made, say what is our view on the matter, give advice to the Government where that is necessary and see why the divisions on the Conservative Benches, which cannot be concealed, are preventing our national interest from being effectively represented.

The Chancellor says that there will be no final agreements at Dublin. It is true that there will be no legislative agreements until Amsterdam and that the Finance Ministers meet again tomorrow, but no one is in any doubt that important economic decisions—perhaps some of the most important decisions that Europe has made on economic matters—are being reached in ECOFIN and are to be put to the Council and to the summit on Sunday.

We know what newspapers across the continent are saying. French newspapers are reporting French Ministers as saying that all but two issues of detail have been agreed. Indeed, the Chancellor told the Select Committee on European Legislation, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), that political agreement is likely at the European Council on 13 and 14 December. The Leader of the House said that we had to have scrutiny in the Committee because political agreement was likely. The Chancellor, reporting back to the House last Tuesday, said that there were only two outstanding issues. We know that the Irish Prime Minister has said that 98 per cent. of the proposals on the economy are already agreed in outline form and that the formal agreement comes to be ratified in Dublin before the legislation is drawn up.

Try as he does to find common ground with his Back Benchers, the Chancellor has to deny the importance of all the decisions that are being made at the moment. I believe that debate is required on the details of those agreements, which are about to be made. I shall raise some of those issues, because parliamentary approval should be sought. The public need to know and to understand what is at stake. If they do not, because divisions in the Conservative party prevent that full national debate on the detailed issues from taking place, it will not be in the national interest.

It is important also to understand why the take note motion is not before the House this afternoon. We were told that the take note motion had to be dealt with before Dublin, yet suddenly last Thursday we were told that it was not necessary because political agreements would not be reached.

Mr. Marlow: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: No, I am not giving way at the moment.

The truth is that political agreements are being reached. The position of the Government and that of Parliament should be known on these issues. What has changed in the past few days is not that no agreements are going to be reached—what has changed is the Government's ability to get that motion through the House of Commons. That is why divisions weaken this country in negotiations. The Prime Minister goes to Dublin without the authority of Parliament to reach the final decisions, when he knows that those agreements are being reached and are only to be ratified at the Amsterdam summit.

Let us look at substantive issues. I have said where the Labour party stands. Our draft manifesto clearly states our position on the principle of a single currency and on the decisions that have to be made. The Chancellor raised the subject of the stability pact. He has reached agreement on all but two outstanding issues. He has agreed that there will be limits to deficits and that there is an agreed procedure for dealing with them. He has agreed that penalties will be there as a last resort and that fines will be paid to the European Commission. All that is agreed—Conservative Members should know that he has not opposed those proposals and that the common view in the Finance Council is that they are agreed.

In addition, the Chancellor has already agreed, as he mentioned, that convergence programmes are important for the outs who remain outside the single currency; that they will now be obligatory; that their contents will include matters on budgetary deficits; that they should be developed along the same lines in reporting as the stability programme; that those plans will have to be submitted every year and that they will form the basis of public comment by Commission; and that Britain could be rebuked for failure to take "necessary action".

Those proposals should be debated in detail in the House, but the main thrust of the Chancellor's report from the summit last Tuesday and of his speech today is that he has secured copper-bottomed guarantees in respect of Conservative Back Benchers' demands that things be written into the agreement to ensure that the obligation to avoid excessive deficits does not apply to the United Kingdom, as long as it remains outside the euro.

Mr. Shore: My right hon. Friend has made it clear—very convincingly—that all the information is now available about the stability pact, about what would happen to us if we remained outside and so on, to enable us to make a rational decision about whether it is in the British interest to join. What we would also like to know is what my right hon. Friend thinks about the stability pact and its imposition on the British people.

Mr. Brown: If my right hon. Friend, who contributes to all these debates and has done so for many years, will be patient, I shall tell him. As he knows, there are two outstanding issues relating to the stability pact that have yet to be agreed and I shall come to those issues in a minute. They are the definition of exceptional circumstances and the discretion that is available to the Council. I think that he would agree that those are important issues on which the Labour party—*[Interruption.]* This is the problem with trying to have a rational debate on Europe. Because some Conservative Members are against a single currency in principle and in all circumstances, they are not prepared to debate the issues that affect the United Kingdom.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Brown: Now they ask me to give way to them, so that they can repeat their views. I shall not do so.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North) *rose—*

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Brown: The two hon. Members, who have ruled out support for a single currency in all circumstances, now ask me to give way simply so that they can put their case. Let us look at the detail—that is what we are going to do.

Mr. Jenkin: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I believe that the right hon. Gentleman is misleading the House. He says that he wants a debate, but when anybody tries to engage in debate with him, he does not give way.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): That is not a point of order for me.

Mr. Brown: The Chancellor tries to find common ground with the rebels. He goes to Europe and comes back saying that he has got what amounts to a footnote in the new agreements that member states that are outside the euro will be under no obligation to avoid excessive deficits—something that was already stated in black and white in the Maastricht treaty anyway.

The Chancellor gets that provision in order to appease Conservative Members, but it makes no difference to them. They have only one mission in mind, which is to prevent there being a single currency in any circumstances—the tragedy is that the Chancellor knows that too. If they can, they will write into the Conservative manifesto that there will be no commitment to a single currency in any circumstances. If they fail to do that, they have made it clear that they will have their separate, personal manifestos and write it into those. They will also write in a statement that they would prefer Britain to be outside the European Union altogether.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: Here is another Conservative Member who takes that view. That is the position of many hon. Members on the Conservative Back Benches—I suspect that they form a majority of the hon. Members present today. Increasingly, they are becoming a party within a party and no amount of rabble-rousing on their part can disguise their agenda and their pursuit of it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is quite clear that the right hon. Gentleman is not giving way. It is his right not to do so, if that is his wish.

Mr. Brown: I shall give way to one hon. Gentleman, but then I shall move on.

Mr. Townend: Will the right hon. Gentleman now come to the heart of the problem? If he, as Chancellor of this country, decided that it was right to abolish the pound, does he accept that that would mean a major transfer of sovereignty from this House to Europe?

Mr. Brown: We do not accept that a country moves into a federal Europe immediately on considering the issue of a single currency. We shall look at the issue in terms of what is the national interest. The hon. Gentleman should look at those questions in detail.

I give way all the time to Conservative Members and, instead of asking questions about details that affect Britain's interest, they repeat the same old question, because they are wholly against the single currency. That is their agenda.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Get to the detail.

Mr. Brown: I am now on the detail. *[Interruption.]* We have one section of the Conservative party saying, "Let's have a debate on the detail," and another saying, "We must debate only the principle and we must rule out the principle of a single currency."

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I shall make progress with my speech now and take no more interventions from the disruptive element that is trying to prevent me from speaking.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington) *rose—*

Mr. Brown: If, in the interests of fairness, I take one intervention from a pro-European on the Conservative Benches, I suppose that it must be the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Dicks: The right hon. Gentleman just said that he would make a decision in the national economic interest. Does he see a distinction between that, which is what the Chancellor said, and the national interest vis-à-vis sovereignty? There must be a distinction. Does the right hon. Gentleman not see it?

Mr. Brown: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is participating in this debate. He is the person who rebelled on Sunday when the Prime Minister talked about irrelevant Members of Parliament who were stirring up the issue to get a moment's fame. The hon. Gentleman asks about sovereignty. I do not accept that a single currency removes our freedom to make decisions on taxation and other issues in the House of Commons. It will annoy Conservative Members that I share the Chancellor's view on that matter—*[Interruption.]* The Chancellor is smiling because he has at least one supporter on the issue in the House. That will be the Labour party's position on the matter.

We cannot sit out these negotiations simply because a group of Conservative Members say that we must rule everything out in principle. We must play an active part in the negotiations, but, try as the Chancellor does to find common ground between him and his Back Benchers, it is becoming impossible as they push him further and further to a position where he cannot agree with them.

On the two outstanding issues on the stability pact, there must be flexibility rather than rigidity in the definition of exceptional rules. On that point we would agree with the position that the French have put over the past few days.

There must be discretion for the Council. Indeed, that was the spirit of the Maastricht treaty. In answer to a question put earlier, we should have the ability to examine

[Mr. Brown]

the state of the economic cycle and to take past trends and levels of investment into account when deciding what action to take.

Mr. David Hunt (Wirral, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman allow me to recap? When a question was put to him earlier, he said that the word "flexibly" did not appear in the document. It was then put to him that page 23 of "A New Economic Future for Britain" says:

"the convergence criteria must be applied flexibly".

What does he mean by that?

Mr. Brown: I thought that the right hon. Gentleman was referring to "The Road to the Manifesto", the document that we have produced and circulated to our members. That has been voted on by 95 per cent. of the members and is the manifesto on which we shall fight the next general election. The right hon. Gentleman is not quoting from that document, but that was my understanding of the comment that was made, and that is the basis on which we shall fight the election. I understand that it is impossible for the Conservatives to have a similar document at this stage. Indeed, it may be impossible for them to agree on a manifesto on those issues, but the Labour party has agreed its position. [HON. MEMBERS: "But what does it mean?"] I explained to hon. Gentlemen what it meant. It meant taking into account employment issues when making a final decision on monetary union.

It is interesting that the Chancellor said little about exchange rate co-operation, but concentrated on the stability pact. We know that the exchange rates of the outs as well as the ins will have to be monitored and assessed under the new arrangements being agreed, but the purpose is to avoid real exchange rate misalignments. Surveillance of what are clearly market-sensitive areas will be published by the Commission in the form of recommendations. Whether binding or not, recommendations in such market-sensitive areas are bound to have an impact. Once again, however, desperate for common ground, the Chancellor tried to get included in the document an understanding that that would be non-binding on the British Government if they were outside the euro.

The House must debate the fact that all member states, whether they introduce the euro or not, will be subject to recommendations on their exchange rates. Those will have market-sensitive implications, and we must take that point into account. We shall support the necessary surveillance. We accept that exchange rates will be monitored and published. That is another issue which, for reasons of holding the Conservative party together, the Chancellor, who has raised no general objections to those matters, chooses not to emphasise.

Mr. Barry Legg (Milton Keynes, South–West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall not give way again. I have made that absolutely clear.

We have dealt with the stability pact and exchange rate co-operation, the issue that will come to the Dublin summit. But, as all the interventions from Conservative Members who are against Europe and a single currency have made clear, the real issue is the single currency. We know that the Chancellor agrees with the principle and that a decision should be made in the national interest. We also know that he agrees that we should assess the advantages and disadvantages of being out as well as in. That would be my position as well. However, it is because the Chancellor is in favour of the principle of a single currency that the Conservative party cannot unite on the issue. That is what the House should face up to today.

At least 50 Members of Parliament and candidates have said that they will stand on a separate manifesto. Like the debate on what the IGC should recommend, the debate on a referendum and the decision made by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet on that matter in March, a pattern of events is consistently followed. Conservative Euro-sceptics make a demand, they expect the Prime Minister to vacillate, the Chancellor digs in, the Prime Minister retreats a little, factional war then breaks out and the war of the factions effectively decides the final outcome.

Even when we have a period of truce, the silence lasts only a few days, sometimes even less, while regrouping takes place so that the Euro-sceptics can fight again. A group of Conservative Members is so implacably opposed to the principle of a single currency that no peace within the Conservative party is possible.

Mr. Marlow: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: No, I shall not give way.

That is the new constitutional theory that runs the Government. Ministers used to initiate, the Cabinet used to decide and Parliament used to approve. Now, however, Euro-sceptics initiate on this great issue of Europe, Ministers are always in a position of reacting, factional in-fighting always breaks out, and the war of the factions decides the final solution. That is what lies behind all the events of the past few days.

When the Chancellor went to lunch at Chez Nico only a few days ago, at the back of his mind was the attempt by Conservative Back Benchers to force on to the Prime Minister a new manifesto commitment, or at least a statement during the election campaign, that he would rule out a single currency. If anybody doubts that, he or she should read the interview given by Lord Tebbit on Sunday when he made it absolutely clear that a plan was afoot. He said that he was in discussion with Downing street and made it clear that moves were being made by some people with influence at No. 10—

"some people like myself—to find a formula which would bring me and my friends back on board. This formula, which looks as though it might be successful, was that we would accept the Prime Minister's word. Let me say that at the beginning of the election campaign he would say, 'Look, Ken Clarke takes his view. I take this view: while I am Prime Minister I can assure you we are not going into the single currency in the next Parliament because the Europeans are fudging it and it would be a mess.'"

That plan led to the article in *The Daily Telegraph*, which was what so exercised the Chancellor when he went to lunch. It was just a few days after the Budget when he had been boasting about the state of the economy. When he went to that lunch with two BBC journalists, was he there to boast about his great economic achievements and his success story in Europe? What was on his mind? What was his agenda? Was it to defend the Budget? Was it to reassert the ringing declaration of his loyalty and that

"any enemy of John Major is an enemy of mine"?

No. What was his real agenda? So keen was the Chancellor, after the events of the previous few days, to unburden himself on the European issue that, it is reported, he did not even drink much of the two bottles of wine that were produced by the BBC reporters—he was talking so much. It turned out to be a perfect lunch. That may be an additional reason why the Chancellor got more exercised towards the end of the conversation. The significant claim that he made was not about explosives or scooters. The significant claim that he made—the straight talking—was, according to the report,

"Mr. Clarke does not doubt that the source of the story ruling out a single currency was someone close to the Prime Minister."

In vino veritas. No wonder his mind was not on the Budget or the economy. It was on the attempted betrayal, as he saw it, of No. 11 Downing street by No. 10. After that, the next stage of the familiar cycle started to work itself out. Nothing that I could say about what is going on in the Tory party could be as damaging as what its members have said about each other over the past few days, with talk of madness, purges, Ministers alleged to be puppets, allegations of political suicide, betrayal, treachery—those are only the allegations that they made about themselves during the past week—words that make the Chancellor's comments about boomerangs, explosives and scooters seem mild and statesmanlike, even if he was speaking through the wine that he had enjoyed. One member—

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I am not giving way now. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Oppenheim: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for having the courtesy to give way. He is in misquotation mood. He claimed earlier that I made a statement on "Breakfast with Frost". It may have been a little too early for the right hon. Gentleman—he was probably bleary. Let me tell him what I said. It was not what he claimed. I said:

"I am a Euro-sceptic. I may not be in quite the same league as you . . . "—

I was referring to the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman)—

"but I would find it totally unacceptable if the British Government was trying to commit us to EMU without having a referendum and without it going through Parliament."

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will have the good grace to apologise for his earlier misquotation.

Mr. Brown: The Minister said that he was a Euro-sceptic. I saw "Breakfast with Frost". He has now read out his statement. The Minister who is to reply to the debate on behalf of the Chancellor later this evening went on the programme as a Treasury Minister who is supposed to defend the documents, and said that he was a Euro-sceptic. *[Interruption.]*

The House will look strangely on a Minister of the Treasury who said publicly on "Breakfast with Frost" that he was a Euro-sceptic. That sends out a clear message. If he says—which I accept—that he does not support the principle of a single currency without a referendum being held and without proper parliamentary approval—[HON. MEMBERS: "Apologise."] If the Minister is saying that he will not support the principle of a single currency—economic and monetary union—without a referendum and without the matter coming before the House, is he saying that with a referendum and after it has come before the House, he will be prepared to support the principle of a single currency?

Mr. Oppenheim: Earlier in the debate the right hon. Gentleman attributed to me a statement that was wrong. It is beneath him and shows ill grace for him not to withdraw it and apologise.

Mr. Brown: I was reading the quotation from *The Independent* on the Monday after the Minister's Frost interview. Does he deny saying that he was a Euro-sceptic? [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] "I am a Euro-sceptic," he said. That is typical of the Conservative party. Conservative Members are divided and they are clutching at straws. We have a Conservative Treasury Minister—

Mr. Douglas Hurd (Witney): The right hon. Gentleman should not debate in this way. After the remark about my hon. Friend being a Euro-sceptic, the right hon. Gentleman went on to attribute to him remarks on the Frost programme that he now knows my hon. Friend did not make. In those circumstances, the right hon. Gentleman should withdraw.

Mr. Brown: I am reading the report from *The Independent*. [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] If I have misquoted the hon. Gentleman, I apologise. [HON. MEMBERS: "Five minutes."] The hon. Gentleman said that he is a Treasury Minister who is a Euro-sceptic. Given a referendum and parliamentary approval, would he support the principle of economic and monetary union—yes or no?

Mr. Oppenheim: Only if the Government of the time thought that that was in the British interest. That is the policy of the Government Front Bench, subject to a referendum. I understood that that was the policy of the Opposition Front Bench, too.

Mr. Brown: There is the division. During the debate the Chancellor said that he supports the principle of monetary union. The Minister cannot say that. Is that not an example of the division at the heart of the Treasury? Conservative Members are clutching at straws if they believe that they can wish away the fact that within the Treasury the Chancellor says one thing and the Minister who is to reply to the debate says another.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: May I tell the right hon. Gentleman that wine played a much smaller part at the lunch than he believes, but that is the least of my complaints against the BBC journalists involved?

On the argument that the right hon. Gentleman is trying so passionately to deploy, can he deny that if he went to lunch with the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), he would not find the slightest shred of agreement on any of his arguments? At least 50 members of the Labour party do not believe a word that he is saying and would vote against his argument if they had the chance. Why is he trying to distract attention, instead of trying to deal seriously with the real issues?

Mr. Brown: The Chancellor knows that it would be extremely difficult to get my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) to a place like Chez Nico.

[Mr. Brown]

Can the Chancellor imagine putting to his party membership his policy on Europe and finding that he could get a straight majority, far less 95 per cent. of the party voting in favour of a draft manifesto?

The situation in the Conservative party is summed up by events since the Prime Minister's interview on Sunday. The Prime Minister went on television on Sunday. He was to unite the party. He would draw a line. Clarity and coherence would reappear. The in-fighting would stop. All the damage done off the record by the Chancellor would be resolved by the interview on the record by the Prime Minister. Yet within five minutes of the interview being completed, the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) was saying one thing, Lord Howe was saying another and the cycle began again—there was a momentary remission during the Prime Minister's interview, before the relapse.

Small wonder it is that Lord Blake said:

"Since I was old enough to vote I have lived through 14 general elections. I have never seen the party I support in a worse state of disarray, a worse state of confusion, of factiousness, than today."

What chance is there of reconciliation when, clutch at straws as they might this afternoon, Conservative Members express entirely different views from the Government Front Bench and have no intention of reconciliation on the issue of the single currency? We were taught that Cabinets decide and Parliament approves. We now know that factions in the Conservative party initiate, Ministers react, factions fight it out and struggle among the factions decides the outcome.

Very important issues are at stake at Dublin. There is the stability pact, which I have mentioned; there is the future of exchange rate co-operation; there is the decision on the euro. The decisions about a European single currency must be made in the national economic interest. In my view, the worst thing that has been happening in recent days is that, when we have needed a debate in the national economic interest so that a decision can eventually be made on those issues, divisions within the Conservative party on matters of theology, ideology and dogma have prevented that decision from being made. It seems that, despite what the Prime Minister said on Sunday, the national interest always comes second.

Three years ago, the Chancellor said that the Conservative party was in a hole. It still is. It has long ceased to be able to govern on the vital issue of Europe. It is no longer seen as a party by the general public. It cannot unite the country; it cannot even unite itself. Its divisions are damaging the national interest. It is time that the national interest came first: it is time that this Government went.

5.30 pm

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): It is a long-established tradition in our Parliament, and particularly in the House of Commons, that on all questions of international negotiations—and, indeed, on many involving national negotiations—no attempt should be made to bind the hands of those taking part, whether Prime Minister, members of the Cabinet or other Ministers. In my experience of innumerable negotiations, particularly international ones, no attempt has ever been made to bind me to particular positions while they have been going on.

During the long negotiations between 1961 and 1963 on the first attempt to enter what is now the European Union, I reported frequently—to the astonishment of my colleagues from other countries involved in the negotiations—but was never asked here to bind myself either to what had been agreed or to what was going to happen. That position should, I believe, be maintained—and more so, not less so, because we are within five months of a general election. That is vital.

These negotiations cannot be finished before the possible date of a general election. We should therefore accept, as a Parliament—I believe that the people of this country are perfectly prepared to accept it—that we shall not know the answer until the negotiations are concluded, whichever party is in power. Unless we do that, we are heading for catastrophe.

I believe that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was absolutely right to say on Sunday that he would not be forced to make any announcement, either now or during an election campaign. He is backed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, and rightly so. I therefore hope that all of them will adhere strictly to what has been said. I believe that it is right. It is what Parliament is accustomed to, it is what Parliament needs, and I believe that Parliament should have it.

When considering the general questions that are at issue, we must recognise that the Six, as they originally were—and the members of the Union, as they are today—have always benefited from the fact that their principal parties have agreed on their membership of the Union and on the steps that have been taken to develop it, as, almost without exception, have all members of those principal parties. There are those who say today that they never realised that there was any politics in it. Many people say that all the time. I am sorry, but it has been clear from the beginning that this was a political development, and also an economic development. There are those who talk glibly about sovereignty. Of course the Union, or the European Coal and Steel Community as it was then, had supranationality. It gave up sovereignty at once, in order to maintain peace in our continent by governing, centrally, what Germany and France could do in regard to creating weapons of war by means of the two materials of coal and steel. That has always been there.

Every treaty has emphasised this. The treaty of Rome, which we signed—we are not in the habit of breaking treaties—sets out quite clearly that what is involved is ever closer union, which involves sovereignty, and that such a union is political as well as economic. That is absolutely clear, and always has been.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Edward Heath: No.

Sovereignty exists for the benefit of the people. It exists for the benefit of our fellow citizens. If we can do something to which our sovereignty contributes for the benefit of our people, its use is absolutely justified.

I must also point out that when it comes to NATO, on which there is very little division of opinion—perhaps I could draw the Chancellor's attention to this—our surrender of sovereignty is complete and absolute. NATO says that an attack on one is an attack on all. It does not say, "You must go back to Parliament to get approval." It

does not say, "You must have a referendum," or, "You must have a general election." What it says is, "Without question, you go to the defence of the member that is attacked." No one could ask for greater abandonment of sovereignty than that. Why? Because we believe that it is justifiable, in our national interest and in the interest of peace.

As for the single currency, an argument that has not been used today but that I consider important is that no single market in the world has more than one currency. We have heard great support for the single market, and in some ways I agree with what has been said about the United States, which is the world's biggest single market—unless we consider the Union to be a fully developed single market; in any case, the United States is a very big single market, and it has only one currency. It is impossible to imagine the United States with 50 different currencies. We can work out individual aspects, but that is a very important one.

The reason is simple. If members keep their currencies, they cheat. That is what we did when we devalued the pound by 15 per cent: we cheated, and they all believe that we cheated. That is an essential aspect, quite apart from the benefit to industry and to individual citizens.

A factor that should not be overlooked, particularly by members of our party, is that industry believes that it will benefit from a single currency in the Union. It will benefit, and that is why it wants a single currency. As for the question of articles 103 and 104, health and society, and so on, those in industry are clear about the fact that that does not bother them. The Confederation of British Industry has said that, if we return to minimum wages at a reasonable level, the effect on us will be perfectly acceptable. Even the Institute of Directors says that it does not mind. Very well: we cannot ask for more than that from the business point of view. Is it not time that we paid some attention to what industry wants, given that industry is the basis of our own existence? Of course we should do that.

We hear a great deal about the nation state. The fact is that the Union, as it is today and as it has always been, is sui generis: it exists in its own framework. There has never been anything like it before, and it is unlikely that there will be. What we must do is not waste time on arguments about the definition of federalism, and so forth, but ensure that what we as a Union need to operate efficiently is there, in the framework.

What worries me is that in all these debates—today's debate was announced as being of great importance from the point of view of the details of the single currency—there is no positive contribution. If there are problems, and we all know what they are, why can we not make a positive contribution to their solution—Members of Parliament, apart from Ministers and the Government? That, I believe, is the task that we face.

As I have said, we have heard a great deal about the nation state. I have not heard so much about the nation state since I was an undergraduate reading political history. In the past, people talked about the nation state; it is only in the past three years, and only in this country, that there has been so much emphasis on the nation state. The plain fact is that the nation state seeks the highest standard of living for its people. That has been the emphasis here, and we must judge things on the benefits that they bring to the people of our nation state.

My view is quite clear: the greatest possible benefit for the nation state lies in the European Union. That is why we must remain not only members but positive, constructive members of it, which in turn will help the rest of the Union to develop in the way that is most beneficial to its people. That is the task to which we should address ourselves and to which I believe the people of this country want us to devote ourselves.

There are perhaps some people here who think that the election will be settled on the question of Europe. It will not. It will be settled on many other issues—and we know what they are. Let Parliament concentrate on making a success of the European Union to which we belong.

5.40 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): It is always a challenge to follow the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath). I must say straight away, however, that although he used phrases such as "sovereignty" and "nation state", the conspicuous absentees were "democracy" and "self-government". What is at stake in our relations with Europe is very much the question of who governs Britain in the future. If that is not of great concern to the right hon. Gentleman, it should be: his failure to take account of that marred his own negotiations and the signing of the treaty of accession in 1973. I should like to spend more time on this matter, but so little is available to us that I turn straight away to what I regard as the major new factor in this debate—the stability pact.

The stability pact was not even mentioned on the Floor of the House until today, or at least until the Chancellor was forced—reluctantly—to make a statement on 23 November, or whenever it was. The stability pact is a major new dimension to the Maastricht treaty. It has three components of which we should be very conscious.

The first is that the norm expected of member states that are party to the single currency is that they should break even on their balance budget account year by year, and the 3 per cent. of gross domestic product figure is the exceptional margin that is to be allowed when things go wrong and when the economy appears to be plunging into recession. That is not exactly what people thought the original Maastricht criterion of 3 per cent. meant.

Secondly, under the stability pact, we are to be subject to fines which could amount to 0.5 per cent. of our gross domestic product every year. That is the formula. In Britain's case, it would be a fine of up to £3,500 million a year—that is what we are exposing ourselves to.

The third and very disagreeable feature of the stability pact is that, although the initial call is to make a deposit with the European central bank, if that deposit is not redeemed after two years it will be turned into a fine.

I find it truly remarkable that, as he told us in the letter he sent to us on 22 November, the Chancellor considers that

"the stability pact makes good economic sense".

He went on to say:

"we believe that deposits and fines will be useful deterrents against any member of EMU stage 3 who maintains irresponsible fiscal policies".

I intervened on the Chancellor and pointed out that, had the stability pact been in force during the four years that he had held that office, Britain would have had to

[Mr. Peter Shore]

contribute £11 billion to the European Union. I then asked him—I ask the House again today—whether we really think that he has been wholly irresponsible in his conduct of our affairs during the past four years, or whether we in fact accept that Britain had fallen into serious recession following our unhappy stay in the European exchange rate mechanism from which we broke out—or were driven out—only in September 1992. The economy was deeply depressed and, as my hon. Friends should understand better than the Conservatives, it therefore made sense to have a large borrowing requirement and to increase public expenditure even though it meant incurring that large borrowing requirement.

That is what sensible economic management dictates, and it is something that we as a party should never agree to abandon, in treaty form, to those in Europe who have an entirely different view about what is good economic policy and an entirely different political aim—that of creating, as soon as they can, a federal state or a united states of Europe. Those people do not disguise their intentions; it is only here that we cannot bear to face the reality.

I find it inconceivable that any British Government should have so little self-respect that they feel they have to be bound by treaties that others have written and hand over to unelected authorities in Europe the single most important financial judgment of the year—the Budget judgment on what the balance should be between taxation and expenditure. Are we really saying that, to pick up a phrase used by a Conservative Member some time ago, we are no better than a rate-capped local authority? Do we really think that we do not have the good sense to make the correct economic judgment for our people and our nation year by year?

If we feel that we no longer have the self-confidence or the ability to decide our yearly economic policy or, indeed, our economic policy as a whole, and if we are prepared to hand over control of not only our interest and exchange rates but the Budget judgment—and to do so without argument—what arguments have we against those who would press us at the intergovernmental conference, as they are now doing, into letting them take over our immigration and asylum policies and even our foreign policy? That is what is at stake.

I cannot believe that the House has so little regard for itself and its people that it is prepared to abandon that which the British people achieved for themselves and which has caused us to be the envy of the greater part of the world because we maintained it for so long and despite great difficulties. After all, most of us have lived through a period in which we in Britain were proud of our achievement in creating something like 40 additional nation states by the voluntary withdrawal from empire. Are we now to abandon for ourselves what we so prized for so many other nations and peoples—nations much weaker and smaller than ourselves and with far less experience of self-government? We should reject the stability pact and all that goes with it.

I come now to an entirely lesser matter of helping the Chancellor out of his difficulty. I intervened on him to tell him that he had a way out, if he was not too stubborn to take it. That way out is simple. Our European partners have indeed cheated on the convergence criteria. I mentioned France, but Italy, Spain and Belgium are all involved in open manipulation of and cheating on the so-called convergence criteria. However, something like two of the four convergence criteria have already been abandoned.

One involved being a member of the ERM within the narrow band of 2.5 per cent.—but that whole system has been scrapped, so that criterion can no longer be observed. In addition, is it not clear that, although the 3 per cent. criterion is still being partly adhered to, the 60 per cent. criterion is being abandoned? There is no question of Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands or any of the so-called candidate states—apart from Germany, France and Luxembourg—reducing their ratio of national debt to gross domestic product in the one year that is left. In some countries, the figure is 120 or 130 per cent. We know perfectly well that those countries will not observe the criteria.

The Government could say, "We don't think you are entitled to join. We don't think that it would make a sensible, strong euro." But that will be decided by qualified majority vote, and Britain does not have a veto to prevent any such candidate country—however fudged the criteria may be—from joining the single European currency.

Other than the political restraints within his party, the Chancellor has every reason to say no to Britain joining the European single currency, to say it now and to maintain that opposition throughout the next Parliament. The same applies to my right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), who knows that there has been no convergence of the real economies.

5.50 pm

Mr. Douglas Hurd (Witney): The right hon. Gentleman always speaks eloquently and in tones of certainty. He speaks now in December 1996 as if he knows what the position will be in December 1997 or the spring of 1998. I think that that is wrong. Next year will be a year of turbulence and uncertainty right across the argument. This year began with doubts about whether the timetable and criteria for economic and monetary union would work. We passed through some months of total confidence, and now doubts are returning.

There are two certainties. First, if the single currency comes about, it will affect us greatly whether we are in or out. Secondly, if it goes ahead, it is in our interests for it to be well constructed and to succeed. It is not in our interests to be surrounded by the chaos and bad-tempered confusion of an abortive currency scheme. That could undermine the single market, which is the greatest achievement of the European Union to date, and is still incomplete.

I have never been an advocate of the single currency. It was planned as the latest in a series of great leaps forward in the integration of Europe. It is a gigantic leap. Currency stability is a sound aim of policy. It is now the fashion to extol wholly floating exchange rates, but retired Ministers do not have to be fashionable. I am sure that Europe needs a system with a bias towards currency stability, but that system should not impel a country to defend a particular exchange rate when economic reality has condemned it. When the memories of the last, partly mismanaged, tightly reined exchange rate mechanism have faded, we shall look again for such a system.

At Maastricht, instead of a flexible system, all those present—except us and the Danes later—plumped for a drastic, inflexible system. That political solution provides that, at a date to be fixed by political decision, every

citizen in every high street in Europe, including Germany, France and Britain, will be told that what he or she has in his or her purse is trash. It assumes that, despite most of the present evidence, the economies of the nation states will converge and, more difficult to achieve, will stay converged. No one proposes what so alarmed my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory). No one would tolerate the huge increases in the European budget that might be necessary to keep convergence in place.

The single currency is a drastic proposal. It is right that if the British Government in the next Parliament—or at any time—decided that it was in the national interest for us to join, there should be a referendum. I am glad that the Government finally decided that they would hold a referendum, and that slowly and in a bedraggled way the Labour party has also taken that view.

One cannot be certain about where the national interest lies. Probably—not certainly—the euro will go ahead. No one can tell what its impact would be on our prosperity if others went ahead and we stayed out. I do not know of a single British institution that is not divided on that issue. Industry is divided, the City is divided, the Trades Union Congress is divided, the Labour party is divided and, occasionally, if I am right, even the Conservative party is divided on that issue.

Many people speculate, but the truth is that we do not know whether our economy and our prosperity would begin to lose blood. We do not know whether we would begin to lose investment, jobs and national prosperity. If there were such a haemorrhage, we do not know how great it would be, or whether it would be great enough to counterbalance the political arguments against a single currency, which are strongly felt, not just in parts of my party.

It would be rash, therefore, for people to say at the coming general election that, without any qualification, come wind come weather, they would never support the entry of this country into a single currency. I strongly support the line that was taken by the Cabinet this spring and reaffirmed by senior Ministers in the past few days.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) said, we must consider this matter against the background of the part we play in Europe. It was disappointing that the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) did not attempt to do that. It is difficult to do so, partly because of the lamentable state of reporting of these matters in our press. Politicians are scared of attacking the press, but again ex-Ministers do not have a great deal to lose. In my experience, it is not possible to read in any of our broadsheet newspapers—except one—anything like a full, plain, factual account of what happened yesterday, whether in Paris, Bonn or Brussels. There is plenty of opinion and gossip, and there are some fine columnists, but factual reporting is thin and trivial.

I shall give one example of that—I could give many. It is difficult to find in our press reports on the liberalisation process within the single market. The Commission and the European Court are our allies in that liberalisation, however imperfect it may be. The prising open of telecommunications, aviation, electricity and, I hope, gas is a huge advantage to British enterprises that are already liberalised. British Airways is a classic example. It is subtly and energetically using the prising open of the continental market achieved by the Commission and the court, and it is seizing every opportunity to pounce and to move in. It is not put off by the caricature of Europe, which supposes that we will always be isolated and defeated.

I have always been against pushing the process of integration to a fully integrated united states of Europe. Many hon. Members and I have seen the reef—a barrier of rocks under the water. That barrier reef is the loyalty that most people—not just in Britain—bear to their nation and its ways. It is not true that we are alone. What defeats me so often in these arguments is the wrong assumption that we are alone and isolated in our feelings. That barrier reef exists in France, Germany and in all the Scandinavian states.

I would be delighted if I were told tomorrow that all the leaders of Europe were aware of that reef and were determined to avoid it, and that their main concern was to carry through what we have already undertaken but not completed: liberalisation in the single market, the enlargement of our Union to the east and co-operation on foreign policy so that we can be valid partners of the United States on important issues.

The priority for Europe should be to make a success of the present before launching further into the future. The arguments that Ministers have made over and again—particularly in the White Paper this year—are valid. They are weakened, perhaps crippled, by the trivial, distorted nature of much of the debate in Britain. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup is right. We are trying to achieve something that is new in history. The United States and Germany are not the models. We are trying to reconcile the identity of European nations with their working together far more effectively than ever before—the ever closer union not of states but of peoples. I believe that that is what most people in the House and in Britain want, and the main danger to realising that is that we shall be defeated by our own defeatism.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. One of the difficulties of 10-minute speeches is that distinguished former Ministers can make statements that are factually not true. The Trades Union Congress is not divided.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. We are not debating the 10-minute rule now.

6 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The debate has been characterised by a great deal of uncertainty and division across the parties, certainly the two larger parties, and in the country. That lack of purpose is a matter of concern. At least the Liberal Democrats have a clear position on a single currency. We believe that a well-formed single currency would be in Britain's national interest. It would help us to cut interest rates and transaction costs and it would help our trade.

The Chancellor gave a robust explanation of what he believed the potential advantages would be, and we concur with that point of view. To some extent, the current level of interest rates across Europe confirms that view. We have the highest long-term interest rates in Europe, with the exception of Greece. Even Italy, Spain and Portugal have lower interest rates than Britain.

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

That is partly a sign of the failure of the Government's economic policy, but it is also a sign that long-term investors in the United Kingdom do not believe that we shall pursue the stable, consistent economic policies to which those most committed to monetary union have declared themselves committed. It makes a fundamental difference.

Those who make passionate statements about what they are against in the frame of monetary union have some obligation to explain how they believe that Britain will operate differently outside and what the benefits would be. Mostly, they articulate the negative rather than the positive view of being outside.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruce: No. I do not have much time and I do not wish to detain the House.

The arguments for and against monetary union, where they are genuine as opposed to rooted in a totally rigid preconceived position, are well known. Therefore, I shall concentrate on the three current most topical issues—the convergence criteria, whether they could be fudged and what that would mean, the stability pact and monetary policy.

The convergence criteria have been well discussed and argued as being good housekeeping agreements by those who seek to prepare themselves for monetary union, which needs to be followed with a degree of firmness and genuine commitment. At the moment, one of the arguments in the Conservative party, which may be designed to lighten the divisions, is that the convergence criteria might be fudged. Those on the extreme anti-monetary union wing of the Conservative party say that they definitely are being fudged and that that is their rationale for suggesting today that we should declare that we want no part of it. Those on the other side may be grasping at the idea that the possibility that they might be fudged is some kind of argument for leaving the option a little blurred.

The reality is—I challenged the Chancellor and he gave me a fairly straight answer—that if the convergence criteria are to be strictly applied, and Germany for one is saying that they must be, and if the United Kingdom were to meet those convergence criteria, which is by no means as certain as some hon. Members suggest, the benefits to Britain in being a founder member of the euro zone far outweigh the disadvantages. It would be a unique opportunity for the United Kingdom to be in on the ground floor of a European enterprise for the first time rather than to be dragged in struggling, kicking and screaming at a later date. That is extremely important.

The Government's position is not quite clear. The position that the Chancellor articulated was that there are real advantages and if those two criteria were met, he was clear that he could argue that it would be in the British national interest to be a member. It is not at all clear whether he has the Cabinet behind him on that.

We are entitled to know the circumstances in which the Government would exercise their opt-out to opt in. The paralysis of the Conservative party and the Government stems from the fact that they are so internally divided that no one but the Chancellor seems capable of expressing a view on that. That is greatly to the weakness of Britain's negotiating and bargaining position. That is at the heart of why the Prime Minister was forced to admit in his interview on Sunday that the divisions within his party were damaging the British national interest and weakening our negotiating position before monetary union. Therefore, I do not believe that opting out, as some member states want, would benefit the Conservative party. Failing to explain the circumstances in which it will opt in is serving neither its interests nor the national interest.

There is no doubt that none of us believes that a monetary union that goes ahead on the basis of blatantly fudged criteria is likely to be sustainable. In a sense, the trumpeting of the merits of the opt-out is slightly overblown in that there is no real suggestion that any member state would be forced unwillingly into monetary union if it were deemed that in so doing it was being asked to accept criteria which other member states knew had been severely fudged—no one favours that—but if they are sustained and we qualify, we should join.

Because the convergence criteria are so important to the determination of who is eligible and whether monetary union is likely to be sustainable, it is inevitable that there should be discussion of a stability pact. The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) is right on that count. Simply to determine on an instant in time that a number of member states have achieved an agreed set of criteria which makes them eligible to join monetary union and for that union to go ahead should not be the end of the matter. The conditions under which new members should join as monetary union grows then have to be determined, and those members within monetary union should determine their relationships with each other. That is perfectly rational and some of the more extreme elements of the Conservative party are simply wrapped up in a lather of phobia about this, without recognising that there have to be agreed principles in order for there to be business-like arrangements. Therefore, there needs to be a stability pact and it needs to be firm, not blurred at the edges.

There should also be some discretion within that pact. Its purpose is to stop nations backsliding into bad old ways. If they do not have the option of competitive devaluation, about which some Conservative Members seem so enthusiastic, they must clearly operate on other criteria and the level of borrowing is a significant factor.

Why should those countries which, for example, have qualified well under the GDP-debt criteria of 60 per cent., be constrained to the same degree as those which have qualified above those criteria but are moving down sharply? It is reasonable that the stability pact should differentiate between countries that have got their GDP-debt ratio down much further than others at the time of membership. The treaty is clear that 60 per cent. was never an absolute criterion, but an objective to which all applicants should aspire and be moving rapidly towards. In those circumstances, it might be possible to say that a country that had got its GDP-debt ratio down to 50 per cent. might, if it so required and if it were agreed by the other members, run a budget deficit of, say, 4 per cent. and not be strictly tied to a 3 per cent. deficit.

Within that context, there has been discussion of the role of monetary policy. It is unsustainable to suggest that the creation of a single currency unit automatically leads to the abolition of sovereignty. It is a pooling of

sovereignty. It is an agreement to share certain decisions in common, in particular the setting of interest rates. It is an interesting comment on the British style of economic management, as contrasted with the continental style, that politicians of both Labour and Tory persuasion seem anxious that they should have the opportunity to interfere in the short-term strategy of interest rate setting, even though the record shows that such interference nearly always damages the long-term interest of sustained recovery and growth. The short-term intervention of successive Chancellors, Labour and Conservative, has created the UK's boom-bust climate. The absence of that facility has contributed significantly to the much more constant and sustainable growth that, for example, Germany has achieved.

Having said that, I believe that whether Britain opts in or out, we should be considering moving the central bank from its position of current transparency to genuine operational independence. That needs to be done whether or not Britain joins in the first wave of monetary union.

Even if we decided to stay out in the first wave, we would presumably continue to monitor our position and, effectively, remain an applicant. Sooner or later, we would by treaty be obliged to create an independent central bank, but in any case the markets would be highly suspicious of an economy that had qualified for monetary union and then refused to join it.

Therefore, it would be highly desirable for us to give a clear signal to the markets that we are not going to take advantage of the position in an irresponsible way and that, as a measure of our good faith, we are going to make our central bank independent. I suggest to Front-Bench teams that it would be extremely beneficial if both could pledge to the House today—although, disappointingly, I do not expect them to do so—that the operational independence of our central bank will be in the next Queen's Speech, whoever wins the election.

The Chancellor made a good case for keeping Britain's option open on monetary union, but unfortunately he made it—this was apparent from the Opposition Benches—against the background of a party that has already closed its mind. He remains clearly of the view that monetary union might be in Britain's interest. He can envisage circumstances where signing up in the first tranche would be in Britain's interests, but many in his party have decided, not because they think that it is in Britain's interests, but because they think it is in their party's interests, to close that option and to leave the Government effectively defenceless in the negotiations.

The sceptical members of the Conservative party are trying to put a fudge on a fudge. The whole point about the opt-out was that it was a fudge to try to placate the Euro-sceptics in the Conservative party. The problem with the Euro-sceptics is that the more the Government give them, the more they want. It is absolutely clear that the opt-out is not good enough. They want it to be exercised now and in so doing they want the national interest to be thrown to the winds.

As the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) made absolutely clear, it is not possible to determine now exactly who will qualify, on what terms, whether it will be viable and whether it will be in the British national interest to join. What is clear is that there is a political determination among the main players in Europe to be part of monetary union. Britain must think carefully about the extent to which our national interest would be well served by qualifying, by seeing others qualify and then by exercising our option not to be part of that monetary union. That would be a betrayal of Britain's economic interests. It would be a lack of vision and a narrowness of appreciation of the fact that Britain's future is bound up in Europe whether we are in or out. Being in gives us a hell of a lot more influence than being out ever will.

6.13 pm

Mr. Norman Lamont (Kingston upon Thames): Since the Maastricht treaty was agreed four years ago, the House has had many opportunities to debate monetary union and the question will not go away, although I am sure that the Government wish that it would. European politicians have performed their primitive rain dance and, contrary to the predictions, the first few drops of rain are beginning to appear.

The Government have had four years to develop their position, years that saw the Danish referendum and the tortured passage of the Maastricht Bill through the House. Our economic performance conclusively demonstrates that Britain can prosper without an exchange rate link to Europe. All that might have been a reason for the Government to have moved confidently towards saying no to monetary union.

The Government risk being left powerless to lead the debate on Europe at the general election. In contrast with the Labour party, they say that they are against political integration. It is not entirely credible for them to be opposed to making Britain part of a federal Europe and at the same time to be neutral on the most important move to a federal Europe ever proposed.

I understand the Prime Minister's predicament, but in Britain there is a legacy of distrust and a sense of betrayal over Europe. I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister said at the weekend not only that the convergence criteria should not be fudged, but that convergence must be lasting. As lasting convergence cannot be demonstrated in advance and as, in fact, it will not be achieved, I took that as a signal that the Prime Minister is moving towards saying no to a single currency, and so he should.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) said, Europe is taking a monstrous gamble—a huge unprecedented risk. The convergence criteria are really financial criteria designed to stop Germany, having to be responsible for Italy's debts. The criteria do not tell us anything about real economic convergence.

The conditions for a single currency in Europe simply do not exist. A natural currency zone—normally a country—has to be both a single and a flexible labour market. Europe's labour market is neither single nor flexible. The most important barriers in Europe's labour market involve the fact that Europe consists of different countries. Someone who has been made unemployed in Motherwell going to Brescia or to Germany to find a job is a completely different matter from someone who has been made redundant in New Jersey going west to find work elsewhere in his country.

The labour markets in individual countries in Europe are notoriously inflexible. I think of the non-portability of pensions, job protection regulations and social security entitlements. Everything that Europe does makes that worse and a single currency would make it worse still.

[Mr. Norman Lamont]

With monetary union, there will be one interest rate for the whole of Europe. Surely the lesson of our experience in the exchange rate mechanism was that it is difficult to set a single interest rate for a whole continent, with different economic conditions in different parts.

The Government say that they will not make up their mind until the last moment because they want greater influence. It is a curious logic to think that other countries will be remotely influenced by a country that cannot persuade itself what it wants to do. The trouble with a wait-and-see policy is that it assumes that there is no fundamental issue of principle involved in monetary union, but a profound principle is involved: can a country continue to be independent and self-governing within monetary union?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer thinks that no such dilemma exists, but the Prime Minister recognised it when he said that the possibility of a single currency was

"the greatest constitutional question to face this country this century".

I quoted to the Chancellor what the president of the Bundesbank and another of its members have said. European politicians are completely open in arguing for monetary union on the ground that it will lead to political union. Not so long ago, I took part in a public debate in Switzerland with Karl Lamers, a European spokesman in the Bundestag and a close friend of Chancellor Kohl. I stated my opposition to monetary union on the ground that it would lead to political union. When Mr. Lamers began his speech, he said, "I am not sure that there is anything to discuss. Of course Mr. Lamont is right. That is why we Germans want monetary union." Whether the Chancellor of the Exchequer recognises it or not, that is what is felt by many continental politicians.

Part of the debate has been about the stability pact. Some of my hon. Friends worry that it will not be enforced and others worry that it will. They are all right. It will be a disaster if it is enforced and it will be a disaster if it is not.

The risks of being in the single currency are far greater than the risks of being out. Britain has nothing whatever to fear from being out. The City of London already trades more deutschmarks than are traded in Frankfurt. There is no reason why, outside the single currency, London should not be the centre of trading in euros.

Increasingly, the only argument for the single currency—it resembles one argument for the EU that is increasingly advanced in desperation—is the feeble one that if we are not part of it, others will discriminate against us. The very same people who tell us that Europe is liberal, outward looking and free trading hint darkly that if we do not go along with its plans, Europe will find a way around GATT and the treaty of Rome to make life difficult for us. That is an argument not for being at the heart of Europe but for having nothing to do with the single currency.

Far from being afraid, Britain should welcome the opportunity to go it alone in monetary affairs and to set an example of what can be achieved with an independent Bank of England and a competitive, deregulated economy, especially to create jobs for the unemployed.

The Europeans support monetary union on the basis of politics, not economic analysis. The mystery is why European politicians are so obsessed with political union. In his recent Harold Wincott memorial lecture, the Spanish economist Dr. Pedro Schwartz said that he sometimes thought that the Common Market had not been

"founded in Rome but in Vienna, on Dr. Freud's couch".

He said that the Germans wanted the Union to stop them falling into Nazi ways; the French wanted to be cured of an inferiority complex; the Italians wanted to become a nation; the Spaniards wanted to bury Franco; the Portuguese wanted to be French; and the Greeks did not want to be Turks.

The trouble is that it is not just the Europeans who have their neuroses; we British have them too. We have been bullied into believing that we can prosper only through Europe. We are told that millions of jobs depend on the European Union. Millions of jobs may depend on European consumers and markets, but no business actually sells to an organisation called the European Union. The Swiss, the Norwegians, the Japanese and the Americans have all increased their exports into the European Union just as quickly as we have.

There is no reason why Britain should not prosper outside a single currency or in a semi-detached relationship with Europe. Our prosperity depends on the efforts of our people and our Government. We should not just be trying to halt the drift towards a European state; we should be trying to reverse it. It is not sufficient just to say no to more powers for the European Parliament and the European Commission. We should be repatriating powers to national Governments.

The British Government say that they want a Europe of nation states, but is Europe really interested in being a Europe of nation states? A Europe of nation states would not seek to weaken our anti-terrorist laws. It would not promote anti-smoking campaigns nor would it have 100 embassies around the world. Should we be surprised by that? Chancellor Kohl has told us that the day of the nation state has passed and nation states cannot solve the problems of the next century.

We are not winning the argument in Europe. There is a fundamental, irreconcilable difference between what we want from Europe and what the Europeans want from Europe and one day that clash will have to be faced and choices made.

6.23 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): I congratulate both my right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) on his speech and the Chancellor, who gave us a fine exposition of the pros and cons of the single currency.

Like my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, I congratulate the Prime Minister on his "On the Record" interview on Sunday. Although I considered him far too negative about the British negotiating stance at the intergovernmental conference and about the prospects for the intergovernmental conference, I agreed with what he said about the importance of British membership of the European Union and the need for Britain to keep open the option of joining the single currency.

Indeed, it is a pity that the Prime Minister has not given a few more interviews such as that one and made a few more speeches in the same spirit. Had he done so, the Tory party might not be in such deep trouble about European issues. The problem is that the so-called

Euro-sceptics who are scheming away on the Conservative Back Benches think that they can push the Prime Minister around and make him change his political position. That is what the article in last Monday's *The Daily Telegraph* was all about. No doubt in the new year they will make another attempt to change the policy. That is bad news for Britain.

I should like to warn the House against the unholy alliance of Europhobic ideologues—we have just heard from one of them—blatantly biased newspaper editors and owners—I do not see any of them in the Press Gallery, but it is typical that they do not want to listen to the debate—and ambitious Conservative politicians who seek not only to capture the Tory party, but to subvert the national interest.

Let us make no mistake about it, for all their occasionally comic aspects, the so-called Euro-sceptics are dangerous people. The term Euro-sceptic is a total misnomer. If they were truly Euro-sceptics, they would approach the IGC pragmatically and want to keep open the option of joining the single currency—as poll after poll shows the majority of people do. If they were truly Euro-sceptics, they would be in favour of compromise and of a constructive relationship with our European partners.

The only genuine Euro-sceptic speech was made by the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), the former Foreign Secretary. He is a Euro-sceptic; the rest are Europhobes. They hate the European Union and all its works. They distrust anything from Brussels and they blame Brussels for almost anything that happens here. In their heart of hearts, many of them still believe that, far from being good democrats, the Germans still wear jackboots. We hear that occasionally from the hon. Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell), who once talked about Panzer divisions. That is quite disgraceful.

Unfortunately, those people are uncritically backed by the Murdoch and Black press. Those powerful combines should declare their interest. One would never know from reading *The Sun* or *The Times* that they were owned by an Australian American who has a commercial interest in keeping nations weak and unco-operative. That is the reality that we never hear. One has to ask how credible the Canadian-owned newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph*, is as a judge of the British interest.

Those newspapers consistently pump out anti-European propaganda. They are a disgrace to the British press. They suppress any debate about the European Union. One has only to ask pro-European Conservative Members how easy it is to get articles or their letters into *The Times* or *The Daily Telegraph*. It is almost impossible. I was amazed that *The Times* actually accepted an advertisement from the European Movement, signed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I hope that that was a turn for the better. Journalists and editors who work for those newspapers should start to examine their conscience and what they are doing for a free press in Britain. Above all, we should be aware of the motives of the leaders of the anti-European faction in the Conservative party.

Of course, there are genuine anti-Europeans, such as the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), who have always been against the European Union; there are genuine sceptics, such as my pair, the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Biffen); and there are the genuine resigners on principle, such as the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), whom I respect for it; but I must query the credentials of hon. Members such as the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). One would never guess from listening to him—and we do so quite a lot—that he headed Mrs. Thatcher's policy unit at the time of the signing of the Single European Act, which not only introduced the single market but greatly increased and strengthened qualified majority voting. One would never guess from his present stance that he was in the Government who took the Maastricht treaty through the House.

One would never guess from listening to the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) that he was at Maastricht negotiating the opt-out. If all is as he has said, why did he not resign from the Government or insist on Britain using its veto? That is the logic of his position. He tells us now how terrible everything is, but I listened to his speeches and he was not saying that at the time. We should examine the records of such right hon. Members, and they should examine their conscience and what they are saying now.

I have a message for my own party. Labour Front Benchers are absolutely right—I congratulate my party on it—to stick to the policy of keeping the option open of joining the single currency in the first wave, if we think that it is right to do so. We are also right to say that a deal is waiting to be struck at the IGC. It is not a difficult deal to make, but it will very much be in Britain's national interest. The Conservative party cannot make a deal because it is so hampered by the Euro-sceptics on its Back Benches.

Contrary to press reports and what has been suggested in the debate, my party is overwhelmingly united behind the party policy that was agreed at conference and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East said, in a ballot of all members. Our supporters will be strengthened by representation in the House after the next election because the young candidates are all pro-European. I regret to say from a personal point of view that some older anti-European Members will leave.

I believe that European policies need to be carried through the House on a cross-party basis. One of the Prime Minister's biggest mistakes has been to rely solely on the Conservative majority. That majority has been threatened by the Euro-sceptics and has now disappeared. There is a European majority in the House; in the right circumstances, there will be a majority in favour of a single currency. There is certainly a majority in favour of a positive European approach, although we never hear it fully, because it is suppressed and subverted by the Euro-sceptics, who do not speak for the majority of the House or—I believe—for the majority of the country.

The prototype for the approach that we should be taking is represented by the all-party European Movement, of which I am fortunate to be the chairman. A number of other hon. Members are also officers of it. We placed an advertisement in *The Times*—the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), who is in his place, signed it—which described what I believe is a prototype. If I have a single message to send to my party, it is this: if we are to be successful when we are in government after the next election in promoting the British interest in the European Union, we need to mobilise the widest possible cross-party alliance for our European policies.

[Mr. Giles Radice]

6.33 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): I do not share the terrors of the objectives of the stability pact that the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) expressed in his passionate and eloquent speech, because I have always believed that rigid monetary and fiscal discipline is the key to prosperity, growth and jobs. We are benefiting today in this country from that austere approach. That is what I have always argued—except perhaps during a flirtation with Keynes in my student days.

I have never believed that competitive devaluation is the easy way out. Oddly, it might have worked—although I do not think that we yet have the full story—when we were most recently bounced out of the exchange rate mechanism, but I do not believe that it worked very successfully throughout the post-war period. It was a desperate remedy to try to compensate for a basic lack of enterprise and firm government by successive Governments, especially the disastrous post-war Labour Government, who got us off to such a bad start after the second world war, from which it has taken us 50 years to recover.

It seems like only yesterday when some of my right hon. and hon. Friends agreed with me that the key was monetary and fiscal austerity and discipline, yet suddenly, they are implying that the disciplines that would be imposed by the Maastricht convergence criteria—which are very disciplined—are undesirable and not the key to economic equilibrium and growth. I am not quite sure why they have undergone that U-turn, given that they believed so strongly—as I do—that the key to good economic policy was monetary and fiscal discipline and encouraging enterprise as much as possible.

I should like to make three assumptions that are almost predictions. First, the euro project will take place. A group of countries, probably including France, will pass the selection criteria in 1998 and get going on 1 January 1999. In July 1999, about six months later—this is the latest version of a little bit of fudge—Italy, Spain, Portugal and possibly Sweden will enter the single currency as well. We must start from that fact—amidst all the adversarial comment, this debate has struck some constructive notes—and ask ourselves how we shall address it.

Secondly, I do not believe that we should be in the first wave. I do not think that we shall be, although Labour Members might deny that. I do not envisage this country joining that first wave in January 1999 in whatever form it takes, although there will certainly be such a wave on that date.

Thirdly, it seems that the choice is really between a weak euro and a very weak euro. The latter is a danger to us all. The prospect of monetary chaos, which would spread far outside those in the inner core and members of the single market such as ourselves to world financial markets, is extremely worrying. It is not at all in our interest to stand back and see that develop.

Although I may not agree with all his nuances, I share the view of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor—he expressed it clearly—that we must play a strong role in the monetary situation regardless of whether we are in or out. Incidentally, I found some of the barracking and baying behind him during his speech, as opposed to the honest interruptions, rather repulsive. I personally believe that we can probably play a stronger role from outside than we could by opting in, but a strong role we must play. The idea that one can stand back, that somehow an independent sterling policy can be operated and that sterling will not be implicated in what others are up to, whether in the stability pact or under other arrangements, is nearing the land of the cloud cuckoo.

There is no possibility of our not being implicated through the exercise of international capital markets in what happens to the euro. As I said, not only will it be extremely bad for us if a very weak euro tries to take off and comes crashing down, but international capital markets will be watching even if it is less unsuccessful. They will consider the pound, and while Members of Parliament think that it is wonderful that we are not bound by the stability pact and are somehow free, there will still be rebukes issued under the surveillance system and the monitoring. Those rebukes will be noted by international capital markets and punishment will be visited on any currency, including sterling, if it has diverted from what are called the convergence criteria but are actually the criteria of sensible, orthodox monetary and fiscal behaviour. Those rebukes will be swift and just as painful as any sanctions and punishments.

The idea that we could stand outside is like our dear old friends in the Lambeth Labour party making the borough a nuclear-free zone, as if when the holocaust came, it would not hurt them. Likewise, when my right hon. and hon. Friends seek to have written on the face of the treaty some protection, it is equivalent to asking that when the rain rains on everybody else, it does not rain on them.

We have to face the detailed involvement into which we have already been sucked. That may be a matter for regret and it could be argued that treaties should not have been signed and that mistakes have been made, but we are involved and we must address the policy needed to pursue our national interest in that entirely new context. That is why I support the German attempts to have a strong stability pact—we should support them from outside—and why I believe that we can, by staying out, play a strong and leading role with those inside. My right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) wisely warned us—some people are living in a world of illusion—that we shall shortly have to face the question of our relationship with that pact. Will the pact be an exchange rate mechanism mark 2—the very words cause apoplexy in some of my right hon. Friends—or will we take a lead in some other type of more flexible central rate shadowing without intervention, of the kind that is being discussed especially in the Bundesbank?

All I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to do is not to live in the world of illusion where they think that there are copper-bottomed guarantees that we can stay clear—there are not—or where they demand that protection is written into the treaty, because it will not be. We shall be deeply involved and we must have a firm policy for our currency to ensure, first, that we play a good role in Europe and see that chaos is prevented from coming to a disintegrating Europe—and that has always been one of the dangers of the single currency project, which I oppose—and, secondly, that we promote our interests and keep control of our internal domestic affairs, which could be bitterly and directly affected by currency chaos.

The policy of waiting and seeing should include a strong wait and a strong see. We are right to stand back from this dangerous project. I see great dangers ahead, but we, as a leading European power, need to play a responsible, constructive and positive role in facing the situation.

6.41 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): During the period in which the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) was flirting with Keynes—to borrow his picturesque language—I was the lowly parliamentary private secretary to the Leader of the House, Richard Crossman, who was sent some 30-odd years ago to find George Brown on the night of the gold crisis. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) will recollect that that was vividly recalled in Mr. Crossman's diaries. Such an experience makes me into one of those, tagged by the Chancellor of the Exchequer this afternoon, who would have us sign up to EMU this proverbial weekend. No wait, no see. We should take the plunge and get on with it.

In that view, I am sustained by the trade unions. The right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), the former Foreign Secretary, was wrong, because the Trades Union Congress statement has gone unchallenged. I am also sustained by employers who operate from Scotland, not on a British basis but on a European basis. Part of the reason why I speak as I do is that every week I travel by the Edinburgh-London shuttle and I sit next to people who are going to Brussels, Dusseldorf, Milan and Frankfurt to do their business in a wider context. Those people influence me greatly. I am also influenced greatly by my excellent local Member of the European Parliament, David Martin, who has done a study in depth of the issue.

The problem is that we are not operating in a vacuum. If we were to start from scratch, there would be arguments on both sides, but the fact is that EMU will go ahead if Germany is willing and France is able—and that seems increasingly likely. In 1999, 12 or more member states, including Ireland, could join the first wave of EMU, because the convergence criteria are not as rigid as they appear. There is no binding rule that countries must have a maximum of 3 per cent. deficit and a debt ratio of 60 per cent. Those are reference values inserted into a protocol and not the main text of the treaty. There are a number of loopholes. If countries are reducing debt or deficit, they do not have to reach the magic figures. If Governments are investing rather than spending, that allows further leeway. The Commission is also required to take account of other relevant factors, including the medium-term economic and budgetary position of member states.

I believe that economic and monetary union could be balanced by an employment union. The Swedish Government, backed by Labour in Europe, argue that the intergovernmental conference should add an employment chapter to the new treaty. That would commit the Union, first, to enable all men and women to attain a secure livelihood through freely chosen productive employment; secondly, to do something about long-term unemployment and social exclusion; thirdly, to ensure that demand grows at an adequate rate to ensure sustainable growth; and fourthly, to promote flexibility by providing workers and job seekers with the skills to adapt to a constantly changing economy. For any Labour Member of Parliament, those are extremely important ends. The TUC argues that if EMU goes ahead, it will have a fundamental effect on the UK economy, whether we are in or out. We should therefore be in the first wave and helping to write the rules to ensure employment and prosperity for all Europe's people and for future development.

The real question for Britain is not whether a single currency is good or bad, but rather whether we can afford to stay out when other leading European Union countries go ahead. What we need is a genuine and sustainable convergence. I shall also be blunt. I would be relaxed—but some of my colleagues would not—about the condition for an independent Bank of England. I do not see that as a bogey or as an impediment to a Labour Government. The sooner we get ahead with a single currency and make up our mind that we shall be in it and enthusiastic about it, the better.

6.47 pm

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid-Sussex): I also wish to congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on his robust speech this afternoon, which went into the details of the advantages and real disadvantages of joining economic and monetary union.

I am one of those who feel that it would, at this early stage, be totally crazy to throw away our option to participate in forming the terms of economic and monetary union, whether or not we join. In saying that, I wish to point out to Opposition Members, who seem to think that there are no interested, positive Europeans on the Conservative Benches, that I am the fourth Back Bencher now to speak along those lines. We are not all Sir Buftons who have been wheeled out to make those comments: we do so because we believe in them solemnly. I believe that a large majority of the Conservative party also believes in them, although among the exceptions is my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont)—an old friend of mine, who is unfortunately absent from his place—who takes a different view. I think that he is wrong, and that he is in the minority. The other Conservative Back Benchers who have spoken so far represent the sensible, positive majority.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Renton: I have no time to give way.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), I have concerns about the single currency, but I feel strongly about the subject because I look back in history. I remember well that, twice at the beginning of my political life, under Macmillan, we made approaches to join the single market, some seven or eight years after it had been founded, and we were rejected by de Gaulle.

In consequence, by the time we joined in 1972, many of the rules had already been decided, including those of the common agricultural policy. We have been arguing and fighting against those rules that were decided before we joined, and paying for them ever since. That is precisely what we do not want to happen on this new, extremely important occasion.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) suggested that it would be good if some of us came forward with one or two positive ideas

[Mr. Renton]

in the debate, apart from the grand scale of ideas. Yesterday, the Bank of England published a little book called, "Introduction of the Euro—What does it mean for business?" It was produced for the joint Confederation of British Industry and the British Chambers of Commerce workshops on EMU this month. I heartily recommend it to anyone who has not yet read it.

Given that there is likely to be a referendum on the subject at some point after the next general election, it would be sensible of the Treasury to ask the Bank of England to produce a booklet spelling out fairly the advantages and disadvantages of EMU, to be distributed to every household in the country before the next election. Only the Bank of England can do that, because it is not politically driven.

Our constituents need to know the facts. Of course, a large amount of hypothesis is still involved, because we do not know what will happen after 1999, but they should have an objective summary of the current situation produced by a respected body such as the Bank of England. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary, who is on the Front Bench at the moment, will take note of that and pursue the idea.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), for whose financial knowledge I have a great deal of respect, hinted that he did not think that we could join in the first wave. If we do not, there can be no certainty that we could join in the second wave after 2002. We cannot take that for granted, for the simple reason that, if we met the criteria, our application would have to be decided by qualified majority voting at ECOFIN, and there would have to be unanimity on the rate of conversion between sterling and the euro.

Despite the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames, it is possible that, by that stage, the Korean and Japanese companies that are currently investing heavily in this country—the House should remember that, in recent months, Korean and Japanese investment in our manufacturing industry has run at a staggering $1 billion a month and in some months has reached £1 billion a month—might decide that, with us out of EMU but EMU working on the continent, they should put their new plant in Leipzig, Marseilles or Barcelona rather than here.

It would be perfectly understandable if some of the countries in EMU decided that it was going along very well without us and that that would be a real reason for trying to keep the British and other countries out, just as de Gaulle did in the 1960s. We cannot take for granted our ability to get in on the second wave.

That leads on to the question whether we can have a truly effective single market—we all agree that that is necessary—without a single currency throughout that single market. We are understandably pleased with the results of the devaluation of sterling a few years ago, just as the Italians are pleased with the results of the devaluation of the lira. It has had a huge improving effect on our trade figures. The converse of that is the chagrin of the French and Germans, who do not want it to happen again, because it had a bad effect on their trade figures. It is possible to argue that every member of a true single market must be within a single currency to stop competitive devaluations that fundamentally change the terms of trade.

One does not like to say it too publicly, but the unpleasant obverse of the coin is that, whatever the formal rules, members of EMU are likely in the long run to bend the practice and observation of the rules of the single market to the disadvantage of those members of the European Union that are not in EMU. That point was made by Sir Iain Vallance, the chairman of British Telecom, in the recent publication of the Philip Morris Institute, "Is the Single Market working?" He said:

"Some form of supranational monetary discipline may be necessary to realise the full benefits of the single market."

I do not think that the European Union is at a critical stage. Progress on EMU and enlargement will be made in future, but it will be slow and tricky, and there will be quite a few changes of course. Sometimes, the only ones who seem to be in a crisis on the issue are us—the Members of Parliament at Westminster—aided and abetted by a generally anti-European press.

I noted the comments of the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice). I end by quoting the conclusion of an article that appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* today—a sometimes anti-European paper:

"At Maastricht, John Major gained an invaluable breathing space that enables us to take part in the formation of EMU without yet deciding whether we wish to join, a negotiating position that we painfully lacked with the CAP. What we must do is use that advantage to the full. We owe it to the electorate."

It is pure chance that the author of that article is me.

6.56 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): I thought for a fleeting moment during the debate that we had all become Euro-sceptics on the single currency—the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) did not know whether we should join; the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not know whether we should join; the shadow Chancellor did not know whether we should join. For a moment, I thought that perhaps we were winning the argument. Then I listened to the reasonable and rational tones of the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) and the uncharacteristically strident tones of my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice).

Mr. Radice: "Passionate" is the word.

Mr. Davies: Strident.

I came back to earth and realised that the Euro-coalition in the House was alive and strong. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] We all know what will happen after the next election: whichever party wins—I expect it to be the Labour party—the Euro-coalition in the House will use every hook and crook, every stratagem and every fear to try to get Britain over the top and into the single currency in the first wave. I have participated in debates in the House on this subject since 1972. I hear the noises of assent all round me as the Euro-coalition bellows from time to time. They are feeling a little confident this evening.

Because there is an election coming, the Government are peddling the line—especially on the so-called stability pact and the convergence criteria—that we cannot rule out the single currency because we, the Brits, have to be in there negotiating in Brussels or Dublin, or wherever it might be. We cannot really trust those foreigners, say the Government, because, if we are not there, those

continentals will fudge the single currency. The Chancellor did not say that so much today, but that was his escape route when he made his statement of 23 November: "The Brits must be there because these Europeans will fudge it and it will be a weak currency. We, of course, want a strong currency."

If we are concerned about fudging, I ask myself, why do we not support the Germans? The poor Germans are on their own in wanting a super-strong stability pact to prevent fudging. Apparently, however, we are not supporting the Germans. Apparently we are sitting with the other fudgers—the French, the Italians, the Belgians, the Greeks and the Spanish. Apparently we are against fudging—but we are not dogmatic about it.

The Italian fudge is elegant and tasty, as one would expect. The Italians have created something that they call a Euro-tax, which is a forced loan that will be repaid after 1 January 1999 with credits against income tax bills. The Italians, I suspect, are using the fact that there will not be a stability pact on national debt, and they will convert budget deficits—to get the deficit below 3 per cent.—into a national debt, which can be above 60 per cent. after 1 January 1999 because there are no sanctions on national debt. The French are not quite so good as the Italians, but we know what the French have been doing as well.

I am not sure whether the Chancellor of the Exchequer comes to all this with clean hands, either. If one opens the Red Book these days, it is sticky all over with fudge. Of course, it is not Italian fudge, but good honest British fudge. What is the private finance initiative but a fudge to try to avoid the public sector borrowing requirement? The Treasury has been very clever about the sale of the Army's surplus property, which cannot be said to be a privatisation. If it was a privatisation, the money would not show up in the European system of accounts, and we would not be able to get borrowing down to 3 per cent. We are fudging as well.

The real fudge is not in Brussels or Dublin, but here, as the Government and the Opposition try by every means to avoid a debate on the matter until after the general election. Labour Members should not be surprised that the Tory party wants to keep down public borrowing and, indeed, is prepared ultimately to allow fines against countries that transgress.

However, some of us—perhaps there are not many of us left—are worried. We represent constituencies where the income per head is much lower than the average, even for Britain; where the unemployment rate is higher; where the percentage of families on benefits increases all the time and where fewer people bring in money from employment; and where public expenditure, sadly, is a very high percentage of the wealth and income. Frankly, those of us who still worry about these things worry that the shadow Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), is, as we saw today, as keen as the Chancellor on the stability pact and all the paraphernalia of fines and reducing borrowing below 3 per cent.

Some unkind people who have made a textual study of my right hon. Friend's speeches in the past six months might say that he would be sitting with the Germans if it came to a decision on the stability pact. But the coalition in the Labour party is now in agreement with the Conservative party on limiting public expenditure, and, in effect, public borrowing.

The convergence criteria and the stability pact will be paid for, and there will be a price to be paid for the fines—if they ever come—and a price to be paid for avoiding the fines by reducing public expenditure. As I have said in the House before, the price will be paid by the poor, the unemployed and the disabled, and by the gradual dismantling in Britain and western Europe of the welfare state. There was a time when one could expect growth in the economy to reduce deficits. That was a long time ago, and the central bank will not allow that any more. Herbert Hoover is alive and well. The central bank will make sure that growth will be choked to prevent unemployment from falling too rapidly.

Growth cannot help us, but of course we could increase income tax. We could pay for the convergence criteria by putting up income tax for the comfortable 40 per cent. But we cannot do that—the consensus will not allow it. My hon. Friend the Member for North Durham had a go at newspapers, and perhaps I will as well. The chattering classes who write for pseudo-radical newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *The Observer* and who live at the bottom of the think tanks that proliferate everywhere are all for the single currency, but they earn good salaries and do not want to pay for it. In the triangular tug-of-war involving the central bank, the chattering classes and the welfare state, the poor, frankly, do not stand a chance.

The chattering classes will no doubt salve their consciences by writing and reading articles about the evils of a dependency culture, and they will hide behind meaningless phrases such as "welfare to work", when there is no work. I read now that there has been a revival of social Darwinism, and no doubt it will be possible to excuse all this on the ground of biology, not economics.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East, seemed a bit worried, and said that the stability pact would be agreed, but that is not how I read it, and it is not what came from the Nuremburg meeting. He hopes that a few little details and directives will be agreed, but I suspect that there will not be agreement in Dublin, that it might very well go to Amsterdam, and not just on formalities. If that is the case, my right hon. Friend will almost certainly be there to decide on the matter. I trust, and I hope, that he will decide against it. I trust that he will have the political confidence and the social conscience to do so. I trust so, but I fear not.

7.6 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): It is of great benefit to follow the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), whose record on European matters has been entirely constant and honourable, and usually right. Both he and I would agree that, in the European Union today, we see an organisation that is visibly failing. It is experiencing an unemployment crisis, and there are getting on for 20 million people out of work in the EU. It is suffering a loss of competitiveness on the world stage. That is extremely serious, and bodes very ill for the future prosperity of all the citizens of Europe. It is losing the respect of the European public.

Instead of grappling with these fundamental problems, the organs of the EU are instead pursuing the wholly irrelevant project of monetary union. The reason is that

[Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory]

monetary union is not primarily an economic project, but a political one. On the continent, it is quite openly seen as the next big step towards a politically integrated Europe, with centralised powers and a federal budget. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) confirmed this when he drew a parallel between his vision of a single currency in Europe and the success of the dollar in the United States.

In the United States, they first achieved a federal union. It took a civil war, incidentally, in which 600,000 American soldiers died. Much later, the United States formed a currency union, and the Federal Reserve was set up only in 1914. The circumstances were favourable, as America has a tradition of labour migration, and the states share a language and a political system.

Most tellingly of all, the United States has a federal Government with federal powers and, by European standards, an enormous federal budget that acts as a stabiliser between the various regions. If we want a single currency zone, we must, and will, have a federal Government with federal powers. That is apparently seen much more clearly on the continent than on the Treasury Bench.

My criticism of advocates of monetary union is that they do not make clear the huge constitutional implications of what they propose. When challenged—an example is the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)—they are dismissive of the democratic issue at the heart of the debate.

Let us be clear. If we join a single European currency, we will thereby transfer decisions on monetary policy immediately and irreversibly to the European central bank in Frankfurt. We will have one representative on the governing council, and that person will be forbidden by treaty law from taking any instructions or advice from the British Government or the House. We now learn, in addition, that there is to be a stability pact to add to the bonfire of democratic controls by subjecting our borrowing levels to external control and ultimately to the judgment of the European Court of Justice, which of course has its own activist, federalist mission.

It is extraordinary that Labour Members—with a few honourable and notable exceptions—who until recently were prepared, and even proud, to call themselves socialists, are willing to accept that control of the British economy should be handed over not only to bankers but to bankers in another country who are by treaty law insulated entirely from the democratic process. Surely some vestigial principle still lurks among them: an attachment, at least, to the concept of self-government and to the notion that we should not hand over to an external authority the powers that the public give to us.

Leaving aside for a moment the constitutional debate, there are enormous economic risks in what is proposed. A national currency is not there merely to give national politicians something to adjust or devalue; it is an indispensable adjustment mechanism that allows policy to be set according to the particular requirements of the national economy.

The economies of Europe have different structures, financial markets, pension funds and trade patterns, and they respond differently to external shocks. To try to force them all into the same financial straitjacket with a single interest rate and a single monetary and fiscal policy would be to risk catastrophe.

We glimpsed such a catastrophe in our experience with the exchange rate mechanism. By 1992, Germany wanted higher interest rates to ease inflationary pressures, while we and many other member states wanted lower interest rates to prevent a recession, and the mechanism broke up. At least it could break up, and we could get out of it. The much-derided devaluation that followed led to the economic success and stability and to the growth and falling unemployment that we have experienced from that day to this.

In a single currency area—this is the warning—those differences and divergences would persist and be repeated. Without the migration of labour and the flexible labour markets that exist in other currency zones, such as the United States, the strains and stresses would become intolerable, and would be relieved only by huge transfers of cash from one member state to another. That was the conclusion of a study group set up by the Commission under the chairmanship of the British economist Sir Donald MacDougall. He postulated at least a quadrupling of the size of the European budget to make possible those cash transfers.

When that point is made to Ministers or to Opposition spokesmen, they simply deny that it will happen, and wish away the conclusions of the study group, because they conflict with their political desire for monetary union.

The question of direct financial cost—the cost to retailers, banks, computer systems, tax agencies and Government Departments of abolishing our currency and converting to the euro—has not yet been raised in the debate. The cost would certainly be many billions of pounds, but when I tabled a parliamentary question on the subject, I was told:

"The Government have not made any such estimates."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. *165*.]

That is in breach of the White Paper, "Releasing Enterprise", in which it is clearly stated that compliance cost assessments are to be provided

"for every proposed regulation that could affect business."

I cannot imagine regulations that affect business more directly than the proposal to abolish our currency, but when the regulations were presented to the House for scrutiny three weeks ago, there was no cost assessment.

Leaving aside the technical requirements and the understanding between the Government and the House on the matter, I find it extraordinary that we may be committing ourselves next year to a multi-billion-pound expenditure project affecting the entire economy, yet the Treasury has no idea what it would cost.

As part of the debate that we have started today, I ask my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary, who may be winding up the debate—if I can attract her attention for a moment; if not, perhaps someone else will hear me—to respect the procedures of the House and give us the information that I have requested. That would be in line with previous Government commitments, and if we intend to spend tens of billions of pounds changing our currency, we would like at least to have the raw material and know what it will cost.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Mike Gapes.

7.16 pm

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I had a conversation on Saturday with a German Member of Parliament who represents Frankfurt. He said that he would be happy if our country stayed out of a single currency, because that would mean that Frankfurt would replace London and get more of its business.

One of the problems in this debate is the incredible insularity and the feeling that we can debate the matter as though we could act independently of the world outside. If we stay out of the single currency, there will be costs, as the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) said. Those costs must be examined calmly. There may also be costs involved in going in, but the fact remains that if there is not a zero sum gain—costs of going in and costs of staying out—we must consider the situation calmly, logically and rationally.

The costs of staying out—in which we would be accompanied perhaps by Denmark and Sweden and definitely by Greece—would involve our political influence being reduced and a possible reduction in our economic potential. There would be speculation against our currency, potentially higher interest rates and damage to inward investment, because the Japanese and others would choose other European Union countries—perhaps Ireland, because it also uses the English language—rather than the United Kingdom, as they might prefer to invest into the single market and the currency established with it.

Staying out in 1999—in January or a few months later—may not be so bad. But, as has been said, there is no guarantee that it will be easy to get in later on. I hope that if we stay out at that time because we do not get political consent, we will recognise that our long-term interest is to be in the system. Surely it is better to face the issue at the first stage than to go into a system that we are known to have entered reluctantly and in a way that could be damaging.

If our economy meets the convergence criteria in 1998-99 and we choose to stay out, we may damage the economy in such a way that we cannot meet the criteria two or three years later. Perhaps that is what some Conservative Members want. As some of them said, they think that it is an issue of principle that we should under no circumstances be in a currency union with anyone else. I do not know whether they took that view when the British and Irish pounds were in a currency union or whether they apply it in all respects to the international economy. Do they think that the Hong Kong dollar should not be linked to the American dollar? If one believes for all time in floating exchange rates and the potential for massive movements that bear no relation to the real economy through devaluation or appreciation over short periods, one will take that view. I can understand free market Thatcherites taking that view but not why people on the left or left of centre in the Labour party or the trade union movement take it.

We believe that there is a role for state and society in the way in which our affairs are governed. The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) asked whether there were any socialists any more, which was amusing coming from him. Some of us believe that there is more to life than a free market and that the European Union has a role in minimum standards, environmental protection and other matters about which we can co-operate with our neighbours.

If the single currency goes to a referendum, the referendum will not be about a single currency but about the position of Britain in the world and the direction on which we focus. It will be a watershed for the sort of society that we wish to live in. I say that as someone who has opposed a referendum because I do not believe that we should have them on narrow issues. But if we are to have one, fine; but let us have it early and lance the boil of Euro-scepticism. Let us get the issue out of the way once and for all so that the people of Britain can choose whether we wish to be a grumbling island off the Eurasian landmass and, though not the 53rd or 54th state of the United States, a country with an important role in the world whose potential is undermined because we have excluded ourselves from our largest markets, our closest neighbours. The political and economic costs—

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): No.

Mr. Gapes: Yes. There will be costs that will damage our trading relationships if we take that course to its logical conclusion. The logic of the Euro-sceptic position is, "We don't like foreigners, especially Germans, and we do not want anything to do with them." I see that the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) agrees with that.

Mrs. Gorman: It was my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans).

Mr. Gapes: I apologise to the hon. Lady if I have maligned her.

The positive Labour case for a single currency was put forward in the pamphlet that 14 Labour Members published in September. It is worth reading. Conservative Members have also written pamphlets: the hon. Members for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) and for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie) and others have written in support of a single currency from a different philosophical point of view. At least they recognise that Britain cannot say, "Stop the process, we want to opt out," because, at the end of the day, it is going to happen. There will be a single currency. The question will be whether we want to be in at the beginning, influencing the way in which it develops, whether we try and fail, as we will undoubtedly will, to sabotage it or whether we sit it out and damage our economy and the future prosperity of our people.

7.24 pm

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): I am bound to say that the European Union issue, symbolised by the single currency, is the biggest that has confronted the country for some time. It looms ever larger as European intentions and the choice that confronts us become clearer. Opinion in Britain is sharply divided, and that is reflected in the House. The division cuts across party boundaries, so the House has become a parade ground for statements of personal beliefs, which are often strongly held. Some of us may feel that we have a surfeit of drill sergeant-majors shouting at us from different quarters of the parade ground introducing confusion into the ranks. Be that as it may, it seems that the choice before us—certainly from this debate—is whether to become more deeply involved in the European Union and pay the political price that that entails, or to preserve such independence as we have and possibly assert it more strongly as circumstances permit.

[Sir Wyn Roberts]

The ultimate determinant of our choice must be the future economic and political well-being of our people. Without political freedom, we cannot properly exercise economic self-control. Of course, we are reluctant to give that control to people outside this country and our democratic process. In these matters, I tend to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) and take a historical approach.

Although we have lost our empire and not yet found a role, as Dean Acheson put it in his damning dictum of the early 1960s, as a people we are still imbued with the imperial spirit; we like to get our own way in the world. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that we are not getting our way in Europe. Perhaps, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) said, it is because we are not pressing our views hard enough.

We envisage Europe as a vast free trading bloc in which we can continue to flourish. But that is not the prime objective in the eyes of the European political elite, as Jacques Santer, the President of the Commission, made clear yet again only last week. Its main thrust is towards greater political unity. That comes from Germany and France, and Germany in particular. It seems that there is no stopping them.

Chancellor Kohl said that the Union is about war and peace in the 21st century; he may well be right. The Germans certainly distrust themselves, and with two world wars behind them I suppose that they have good reason. Perhaps they can see foresee troubles on their extensive eastern and southern frontiers and want the moral and military power of Europe behind them in resolving any difficulties that may arise. That is understandable from their point of view. But what is the British interest in all that? We have learned from our participation in two world wars that we have an interest in the preservation of peace in Europe, but historically our ability to influence developments and events in Europe is limited, especially without the backing of the United States. Any thought that we can do so independently is illusory. We are an island, not a continental power.

We also have our eyes on the rest of the world, especially those parts of it where we have traditionally exercised great influence. It is a fact of life that the most promising prospects of economic growth in the next century lie outside Europe in Asia and the emerging markets elsewhere. As a trading nation, we cannot afford to be confined and tied down by our European involvement, as will inevitably be the case. So the challenge to us now is to keep our foothold in Europe, reaping such economic advantages as we can at the least possible political cost. We certainly cannot afford to endanger that 60 per cent. of our trade which is with Europe. Nor can the European countries afford to lose their trade with us. We certainly cannot afford to lose all the foreign investment that has come here on account of our membership of the EU and the single market.

The Government have a difficult task in ensuring that our future remains unshackled and that any opt-outs that we secure are respected and not eroded. The "wait and see" description of the Government's policy is a misnomer. I believe that the Government are in there fighting for British interests, and they must continue to do so as vigorously as possible. It may often look like a rearguard action because of the considerable extent of our involvement to date and the way in which we have been drawn in ever closer to the European vortex which so many of us find uncomfortable.

The pledge that no irrevocable commitment to a single currency will be given without a referendum—a pledge that has been belatedly reciprocated by the Labour party—should provide sufficient reassurance. I cannot agree with my colleagues who would like the Government to commit themselves in advance to blocking out a possibility which may or may not materialise and, if it does, might profoundly affect us, whether we are in or out of the single currency and what I call its accoutrements—the central bank and so on. Our negotiators must not be sent naked into the conference chamber, to adapt a phrase that may still be familiar to some. We really must trust my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor, who will report to the House at every stage.

One thing seems certain. The Leader of the Opposition and new Labour are more committed to more of the European agenda than is the Conservative party. I am not talking only about the social chapter. There is a pseudo-socialist ethos to present-day Europe and my guess is that new Labour is comfortable with it. The idea that primacy should be given to Britain's interests as a trading nation does not sound quite Labour's line. It may be antipathetic to them. I believe that new Labour would willingly throw in its lot with the other European nations in the Union and hope for the best, which might well be made attractive to the mass of British electors in the short term.

We should take a long-term view of British interests. Wages and standards of living may be low in the emerging markets now, but they will not always be so. We know that those markets can develop. We must not only face up to their competition but supply those expanding markets. Just as the European Common Market beckoned us in the second half of this century, the global market is beckoning us now, as we approach the next century.

I think that I have made my position clear. I hope that we stay in Europe and safeguard British interests there. At the same time, I hope that we are not so closely bound up with Europe that we are unable to take full advantage of the burgeoning opportunities in the world outside.

We must not get so involved in the detail that we lose sight of the principles that should govern our policies. Politics and economics are inextricably intertwined in this situation and there is no clear dividing line. There is an element of give and take and our job is to ensure that the take is more substantial than the give, not just for the present—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order.

7.34 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): It was reported recently that at the time of the Maastricht treaty the Prime Minister did not believe that the other countries were serious about the third stage of EMU. If that was the position, I am rather surprised. It is spelt out clearly on

page 87 of the Maastricht treaty. The leading and founding countries of the European Union have always wanted to proceed to deeper integration. Britain has always made the mistake, whichever party happened to be in office, of underestimating the deeply held and far from secret wish of those countries, particularly France and Germany, for deeper integration. So it comes as no surprise to me that the leading countries which have signed the treaty on the third stage of EMU now wish to proceed as quickly as possible.

Nor should we work on the assumption that when those Governments argue and press for deeper integration, they are necessarily out of step with most of their electorates. I have been pleased and encouraged by the demonstrations that have occurred in a number of European countries. I do not know whether some of my hon. Friends who are very keen on the third stage of EMU believe that those protests and demonstrations—today in Spain and recently in France and Germany—against convergence and what it implies have been justified. I believe that they have been because it has meant large cuts in public expenditure and services.

Some Conservative Members argue that we should not take too seriously the convergence criteria and the rest of it. I accept that there is a good deal of fudge, but the fact remains that many public expenditure cuts have been made on the continent to meet the criteria. Hence the reason for the protests, led in almost all circumstances by trade unions.

One of the ironies of the political situation in Britain is that the sorts of policies to which I am opposed in so many respects are precisely the policies of which the Euro-sceptics in the Conservative party are usually in favour, including strict economic and fiscal discipline, taking the axe to public expenditure and continued privatisation. Conservative Members who have been critical tonight have described what they called a pseudo-socialist Europe, but such policies are hardly what I would describe as socialist or on the left. It is understandable that many of us have the deepest reservations about pursuing those policies.

One of the differences of view about deeper integration between the continental countries and Britain is that most people in Europe probably believe that it will reduce substantially the chances of another European war. That is why I said earlier that I accepted that when national Governments on the continent pressed for deeper integration, they were not necessarily out of step with their electorates. It is a view sincerely held by people. I do not believe—I want to make this clear—that EMU or anything connected with it is a deep German plot to carry out economically what they could not carry out militarily in the past two wars. That view is alien to my thinking and, I imagine, to that of almost everyone in the Labour movement.

I do not however take the view that European peace is dependent on a tightly integrated Europe. On several occasions, it has been said that stable democracies rarely go to war against each other and that is true. I cannot accept the view expressed by the hon. Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell), who I understand was reported as having said, at the last meeting of the 1922 Committee, that this is another 1940. Despite all my reservations, I do not believe that this is another 1940.

Sir Peter Tapsell *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Winnick: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head. If he says he was reported incorrectly, I accept that entirely.

It is important to have a balanced debate and to recognise that the situation is as far removed from that of 1940 as it possibly could be. As I shall argue, there are many concerns about political and economic sovereignty, but it would be foolish to exaggerate in such a way as to make it appear that this is the same situation as we faced 56 years ago.

On the third stage of EMU, I have heard my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), who is the chairman of the European Movement, and my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) express their enthusiasm. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow said that he would like to go into EMU as quickly as possible.

However, I heard the same enthusiasm expressed by some of my hon. Friends and by some Conservative Members in connection with the European exchange rate mechanism. I heard the same wish on the part of the European Movement—we were told that we should not any longer be isolated and that to stay out of the ERM would be disastrous for Britain. I know what was disastrous for Britain—going into the ERM. Any recovery that we have experienced since 1992 started after we left. Of course I have such reservations, because EMU would lock us in even further than did the ERM. No one could argue that the ERM was not disastrous for Britain, although we could argue about whether that was because we went in at the wrong rate. Given that it was disastrous for Britain, why should we conclude that joining the third stage of EMU and having a fully integrated economic Europe would be to our advantage?

Whichever view we take, there are profound implications relating to the economic and political sovereignty of this country. That is why it is right and proper that, at the appropriate time, the British people should have a say. I am not generally in favour of referendums, but this issue is so serious and so profound that it is necessary to consult the British people in the same way as they were consulted in 1975. We should not work on the assumption that we know best and that we can, in the next Parliament, act on an issue of such significance for this country's future without consulting the people in some form other than a general election. That is why I am pleased that both main parties are now committed to a referendum.

I am glad that this debate is taking place. We shall continue it for a long time to come, because the issue is not settled. We are not going to join EMU in the near future, as my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow would like. When we do—if we do—it must be on different conditions from those laid down in the Maastricht treaty.

7.43 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on a speech made in the face of barracking from in front

[Sir Peter Emery]

and behind. He set out to try to make a debate and spelled out in a reasonable fashion both the pros and the cons of the problem. Hon. Members on both sides of the House should congratulate him on that effort.

In debating fashion, I turn to two of my right hon. Friends, who have now left the Chamber. My right hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Renton) tried to remind the House that, if we did not get into the common currency in the first wave, we might not get in in a second wave. That is exactly what happened when we did not insist on signing up to the treaty of Rome—we allowed that to be signed so that it could be completed before the German and French elections, but said that we would come in soon afterwards. In fact, after two years of negotiation between 1962 and 1963, and just as everything appeared to be favourable, down came the no. It was 20 years before we became part of the Common Market.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) seems to claim that every European Member of Parliament is massively in favour of a federal, unified structure of greater growth. That simply is not true. I am a member of the North Atlantic Assembly and treasurer of the parliamentary assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Nearly twice a month, I meet Members of Parliament from all the countries of the European Community. On the whole, I find that the Germans and the French have no desire for a position whereby their economy and their fiscal and monetary policy are controlled by a central bank; they want to be able to ensure that French and German taxes are controlled by Frenchmen and Germans, just as we want to ensure that our policies are controlled by the English people.

I am concerned that a number of my hon. Friends, normally described as intelligent, if not highly intelligent, are allowing prejudice to overcome logic in this matter. Of course, there have always been a handful of Conservative Members and a handful of people in the country who have never wanted to be in Europe at all, but they have always been a very small minority. In the past, they pointed to Sweden and Switzerland and to what those countries were doing. Now, Sweden is a member of the European Union and Switzerland—the most non-aligned of all countries—has applied to join. How can it make sense that we should stand apart?

Some argue that we can align ourselves with the Commonwealth and with America, but the Commonwealth, in the old sense, no longer exists as a trading bloc. Australia and New Zealand participate massively in the Association of South-East Asian Nations and look to the far east as their market. Canada has already aligned itself with the trading bloc that includes America and Mexico. America, in many instances, looks to us as the influential player in Europe that has the greatest affinity to the United States. If we were not in Europe, playing a major part, the Americans would soon turn to Germany or some other EU member state for such a relationship. Equally, anyone who believes that inward investment from Japan and Korea would continue to come to Britain if we left is dreaming. Those countries see production in this country as the way to get their products into the European continent.

The negotiations surrounding the common currency are massively complicated. No one knows today what the presiding conditions will be at the end of negotiations. We have some idea, but we do not know absolutely. No ordinary person with any common sense will either accept or reject a proposition or deal until he knows all the surrounding facts. For instance, our national reserves might be used to stabilise the whole European monetary position—whether or not that was to our advantage. Would that not change if we negotiated a reserve position that allowed Britain to use British reserves, when we wanted to do so and, in any necessity, for our domestic fiscal or economic position? That could easily be negotiated and I suggest that it should be.

The position if the central bank set the rate of interest within a snake, perhaps with a variation of 2 or 2.5 per cent., would be vastly different from what it would be if a single rate of interest were set, and it would allow the sort of development that we would want in the British economy. Therefore, the concept that a common currency would allow a European central bank to dominate Britain's fiscal and monetary policy need not be true. If it is, there is a different picture to paint of the euro. If we saw that investment continued to come to Britain, that, too, would alter our judgment.

I am not in favour—I would fight it as a matter of basic principle—of Britain being pushed away from our growing trade success, brought about by the conditions established by a Conservative Government. Nor am I willing to see Britain's position in the world eroded. But the first absolute fact in the argument about EMU and a common currency is that Britain will be and must be affected, whether we enter the currency or not. It is therefore essential that the Prime Minister goes to the IGC in Dublin to negotiate, with the backing of the nation, to ensure the best possible deal for Britain. Anybody who does not want the best possible deal to be negotiated for Britain should stand up and be counted.

Do we start, before the negotiations begin, by declaring unilaterally that under no regime and in no circumstances would Britain join a common currency? In two quite disparate ways, that is nonsense. Certain businesses, and commercial and tourism interests, find considerable advantage in a common currency and their opinions must hold some weight, even with the sceptical. Before we make up our minds, we need to know the facts. We need to ensure that those matters, which are imperative for Britain's interests, are tied up as legally as possible.

I appeal to the whole House to accept the obvious fact that if, at the start of the negotiations, we categorically state that our position is to undermine and contract out of a common currency, none of our friends will be interested in our arguments and views. Of course we shall sit at the negotiating table, but everyone will turn a deaf ear to our arguments and proposals. That will not be negotiating to win the best position for Britain; it will be exactly the reverse.

Some people have made the ludicrous claim that most Conservative Members support the Euro-sceptics or the Euro-sceptical position rather than the position of the Government and the Prime Minister. Those who repeat that untruth must believe in the Goebbels philosophy that, if one keeps saying something frequently enough, people will eventually believe it.

What are the facts? Only eight weeks ago at a conference of more than 3,500 Conservatives in Bournemouth, support was given on the conference floor to the Chancellor, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary without a ripple of dissent, interruption or speech in opposition. A vast standing ovation was given to the Prime Minister—[*Laughter.*] Some Conservatives may laugh at that, but that is how the people in the country feel. Senior members of the Conservative party, who claim to be good Conservative Members of Parliament, should realise that, if they continue as they are, they will lose the election for the Conservative party. That is what our constituents feel.

The media's calling the Prime Minister's stance a "wait and see" policy was disparaging and misleading. The Prime Minister's negotiating stance is best for Britain—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Keith Hill.

7.53 pm

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): This has been an excellent debate, because it has provided a platform for a number of highly reasonable and positive contributions on the single currency from hon. Members on both sides of the House. Hitherto, the so-called Euro-sceptics have dominated discussion surrounding a single currency, and few issues in modern British politics have been the subject of wilder exaggeration and distortion.

Not all the distortions have been confined to the Prime Minister's enemies and the Conservative party. I regret to say that we continue to hear from Labour Members about the myth of the £18 billion cut in public expenditure, which, it is asserted, would be forced on us to meet the 3 per cent. criterion. Ludicrous claims are made about massive rises in income tax and VAT. It is even claimed that unemployment could rise by up to a million.

None of that is true, however. The Treasury summer forecast projected a deficit of 3 per cent. in 1997-98, a figure endorsed by the International Monetary Fund. The Red Book now puts the figure at 2.5 per cent., both for the public sector borrowing requirement and for the general Government financial deficit, which is the deficit measure now adopted by the European Commission. Nothing that I have heard from my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor suggests a significant relaxation in that target, even if the market would permit it, which is doubtful. Are my hon. Friends who have so far stuck to the £18 billion myth so pessimistic that they believe that growth will cease under a Labour Government? I cannot believe that that is a rational or politically appropriate expectation.

The dominant myth among Conservative Euro-sceptics is different. It is that entry into a single currency will represent a terminal loss of sovereignty or, even more dramatic, an irreversible step towards creating a European super-state. In part, as Professor Joad might have said, it all depends on what one means by sovereignty. I shall say a little more about that shortly.

It is simply wrong to claim that a single currency will mean the end of the British state. Since 1921, Belgium and Luxembourg have enjoyed the benefits of a currency union without any trend towards political integration between their countries—quite the contrary, as anyone who knows anything about the history of Belgium understands. Perhaps we should learn something from those countries and their experience of a currency union. Whereas Britain stands at No. 18 in the OECD's world prosperity league, Belgium stands at No. 5 and Luxembourg tops the list.

Let me bring the argument closer to home. For nearly 60 years, until 1978, Ireland and Britain had a de facto monetary union. Would any hon. Member seriously suggest that that led to the political integration of our countries? The idea is preposterous. It is equally preposterous to imagine that monetary union—a single currency—will in itself coerce the nations of Europe against their will into a European super-state. The facts of history speak against it.

The next fallback for Euro-sceptics is loss of economic sovereignty; yet, five days ago, two words from the chairman of the American Federal Reserve wiped £14 billion off the value of stock in the City of London. We must ask ourselves just how real is the concept of economic sovereignty in the modern world of interlocking financial markets. What genuine freedom of manoeuvre nowadays remains to a British Chancellor of the Exchequer when it comes to setting interest rates, deficits and the level of debt? Like it or not, the decisions of the Bundesbank, currently made only in the interests of Germany but backed up by the money markets, determine the main outlines of monetary policy in Britain as elsewhere in Europe.

Is it not logical, therefore, that Britain should be represented in a European central bank, exerting a direct influence on European economic and monetary policy in the British interest? Whether inside or outside EMU, Britain will have no option but to pursue the convergence criteria. The markets will give us no choice. Are we to understand that Conservative Euro-sceptics think that the markets would be wrong? Are we to understand that they are in favour of deficits over 3 per cent. and debt ratios at more than 60 per cent.? For 17 years, the Conservative party has preached the gospel of sound money. Is devaluation the new Euro-sceptic orthodoxy? If we opt out of EMU, that will be the inevitable conclusion drawn by the money markets. With equal inevitability, Britain will pay the penalty in higher interest rates and lost jobs.

The last refuge of the Euro-sceptic is the currently fashionable argument that the convergence criteria are being fudged, the stability pact will not work and, two or three years down the road, it will all end in tears. Even if that happened to be true, there is no way that Britain could escape the fallout. That in itself is a powerful argument for our remaining at the centre of the negotiations, doing our best to get it right.

Of course, putting public finances on a sound footing is a stressful exercise. We should know a little about that in Britain. Is it seriously suggested that our European partners are going through all that pain, with no intention of sticking to the criteria? Our European partners are already proving that they can reduce the deficit sharply in a short period and sustain those reductions. In 1993, Sweden's deficit stood at more than 12 per cent.; in 1996, it is just under 4 per cent. It is now likely that Sweden will meet the criteria for EMU.

It is patronising and ignorant to suggest that our European partners would sign up to EMU and not be serious about the criteria or about their commitment to fulfilling them. EMU will happen. Our European partners will make it happen, because it makes sense for their economies. It makes sense for Britain too, and I see no virtue in delaying our entry.

In explaining our case for the euro, we should not fall into the trap of exaggeration and distortion, which has characterised the Euro-sceptic approach. The benefits of

[Mr. Keith Hill]

EMU will not be huge, but they will be widespread and significant. The elimination of national currencies will be cheaper and more convenient for the tourist. The ending of transaction costs will improve the competitive position of small to medium-sized firms vis-à-vis large companies. The consumer will benefit from increased cross-border competition between firms, once all prices are quoted in the same currency. EMU will render currency speculation obsolete. That will be a special gain to British firms and to small traders in particular, whose exports and business plans have often been damaged by fluctuations affecting sterling in the post-war period.

For a country such as Britain whose currency has carried a risk premium because of our record on inflation and devaluation, there will be a permanent gain in lower interest rates. That will mean higher growth and more jobs, cheaper mortgages for British householders and cheaper finance for industry.

Those are the sensible and practical economic and financial arguments for monetary union. Sooner, I hope, rather than later, the Labour Government will hold our promised referendum on the single currency. When that day comes, I have no doubt that the common sense of the British people will give us a massive yes to the euro.

8.3 pm

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): To reply to the question put to me by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), I did not suggest in a recent speech that there was any military analogy between 1996 and 1940. The point that I made was that there are rare occasions in politics when the use of the word "never" is justified. In 1940, Churchill said that Britain would never surrender. I thought that we ought to say in 1996 and 1997 that Britain would never join a single currency.

We should make that declaration not only because of the serious technical disadvantages that would flow from membership of a single European currency—I earned my living, such as it was, for 35 years in the City of London in currency and bond markets—but because the overwhelming argument against joining a single European currency is the constitutional argument.

I cannot accept that it is possible to join a single European currency without giving up a large measure of our national sovereignty, particularly because the mechanisms of the single currency that are proposed are essentially undemocratic. As many hon. Members on both sides of the House have pointed out, the proposed European central bank, which would dominate the proceedings, would not be accountable in any democratic way to any elected body.

Only three days ago, President Chirac said that he was concerned about the undemocratic nature of the European central bank and suggested that some counterbalance to it was needed. For some extraordinary reason, he seemed to think that the proposed stability pact might provide that counterbalance.

It must be remembered that a nation state depends for its continued existence on three conditions: control of its armed forces, control of its currency and control of its borders and the territory contained within them. If it loses any of those, it ceases to be a nation and becomes a satellite, a province or a Government in exile, such as those of many countries that were set up in London during the war.

Without control of our currency, we would lose control of our interest rates. Those would be determined by the European central bank. Britain would be particularly adversely affected by that: interest rate movements have a greater political impact in Britain than in any other country in continental Europe, because a far higher proportion of people buy their houses in Britain and there is a much smaller rented sector than in the rest of Europe. Everyone knows that the smallest movements of interest rates in Britain have a large social and political impact via mortgage rates. The idea that those decisions should pass into the hands of non-accountable foreign bankers is politically unacceptable.

What guarantee is there that the European interest rate would always be appropriate to the needs of the British economy? The hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) made that assumption. He understands such matters, but I draw different conclusions from his. I do not understand why he assumes that sterling outside the euro would necessarily be a weak currency. On the contrary, precisely because there are fears throughout Europe and among international fund managers that the euro may come into being, there has been a considerable outflow of their funds into Switzerland and Britain. Even the Germans have been transferring money into sterling for fear of the euro.

Following our experience with the exchange rate mechanism, I do not know why the hon. Member for Streatham should assume that our interest rates would necessarily be higher if we were outside the euro than if we were in it. They would, of course, vary according to the state of the British economy in relation to the state of the continental European economies.

In the period from 1990 to 1992, our interest rates would unquestionably have been lower if we had been outside the ERM. I remember clashing publicly and quite fiercely on two occasions with my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), who was then the Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he kept saying that if we left the ERM, our interest rates would go up. I argued forcefully during that period that we should leave the ERM before we were driven out and that our interest rates would go down. I do not think that there is any certainty about those matters, but I think that it is important for us to retain effective British control of them.

It is time for the leaders of our nation, particularly the leaders of the two main political parties, to spell out clearly to the British people exactly what is their vision of the Europe of the future, and what that future holds for us. If the vision is of a Europe of independent nation states co-operating to increase trade and prosperity and combining to maintain peace and combat crime, it is a vision behind which all the British people could unite; but that vision is wholly incompatible with British membership of a single European currency, and it is grossly dishonest and insulting to the intelligence of the British electorate to pretend otherwise. A single European currency is the chosen instrument by which Chancellor Kohl plans to create a federal super-state.

I, too, frequently attend international conferences in Europe. I was in Helsinki the other day—the day on which the Finns joined the exchange rate mechanism. Everyone there, from many European countries,

welcomed it, because they saw it as a step towards the building of a federal Europe. I have seldom met a leading politician in a continental country who was not enthusiastic about the building of a federal Europe. European politicians think that the single currency is the essential element of such a process, and that is why they attach so much importance to it.

The idea that certain absolutes should be laid down, in the form of the Maastricht economic criteria, strikes me as naive and economically illiterate. We all know that in every aspect of life, especially politics and business, the laying down of absolutes is usually very unwise. It so happens that, in this particular phase of the British economic cycle, the Maastricht criteria are consistent with the broad economic policies that any sensible British Government would now be following—we are following them with great success—but that will not always be the case for Britain, and it is certainly not the case for France or Spain now. Indeed, it was not the case for Britain in the ERM in 1991 and 1992.

The idea that one particular set of economic targets will always be appropriate for a wide variety of countries in all circumstances, at different stages of their economic and social development and at different stages in their trade cycles, is absurd. That degree of convergence is unattainable, and always will be.

Anyone reading the economic provisions of the Maastricht treaty would suppose that John Maynard Keynes had never lived. The capacity to employ variations in our country's exchange rate, interest rate and fiscal arrangements is an essential economic tool if Britain is not to be plunged into mass unemployment.

8.13 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I welcomed the opening speeches of the Chancellor and shadow Chancellor. Both clearly stated their personal support for the principles of a single currency, and argued strongly for its advantages—provided, of course, that the convergence conditions were met. Both made excellent speeches, which I believe have moved our debate forward considerably.

One of the accusations levelled against the Chancellor by those sitting behind him during his speech was that much of the motivation for the drive towards a single currency was political. I do not think that we should be embarrassed about saying that the single currency is a political as well as an economic project: of course it is. A serious political debate is taking place in Europe today—but it is not between those supporting the caricature of federalism and the super-state and those supporting subsidiarity; the real debate is between nationalists and unionists.

As the Chancellor made clear, there is no federalist plot or project for Europe. What there certainly is, however, is a unionist argument within Europe. I am a unionist when it comes to Europe, for exactly the same reason that I am a unionist in the debate about the future of the United Kingdom. I oppose nationalism in Europe for exactly the same reason that I oppose it at home. That is because I believe that the peoples and nations of Europe grow stronger and are enriched when they co-operate, combine and pool their sovereignty. That is the real argument that is going on, not the absurd argument and accusations about a federal super-state. The real argument is between unionists—those who want the ever-closer union in Europe to which the treaty of Rome refers—and nationalists—those who believe in maintaining the maximum degree of sovereignty, and favour an abstract concept of independence for nation states.

I cannot understand those Tory Members who are staunchly unionist when it comes to the multinational Union of the United Kingdom, but somehow transform themselves into nationalists when it comes to addressing the same issues in Europe. I find that illogical, just as I find it illogical for some Opposition Members to be nationalists—Scottish nationalists, for example—in the United Kingdom, but unionists in Europe. I find those positions inconsistent.

I do not think that we should hide from the fact that there is a political argument behind the case for economic and monetary union. It is not simply a dry and bloodless argument over statistics; politics is at its heart, and those of us who have a political belief in an ever closer union should be happy and proud to declare that.

The economic arguments are also vital. Some economic issues have been identified today as obstacles in the way of monetary union. The right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), for example, advanced an argument that has become quite familiar in the debate—that Europe is not what the economists call an optimal currency area. In other words, the regional differences between European countries are too great to permit their currencies to be locked together without the risk of dislocation and turmoil in those countries.

Although it is used a lot, I do not consider that a serious argument. It is obvious that none of the national currencies that currently exist in Europe occupies an optimal currency area; it is absurd to think that they do, or that they ever did. Europe's existing national currencies were not based on any rational calculation by a committee of economists: they are the product of historical and political evolution. There are huge regional differences within the existing national currency areas.

If the north of Italy were a separate country—as some northern separatists would like it to be—it would be the richest country in Europe; yet that zone of growth in northern Italy shares the lira with regions such as Calabria and Sicily, which are notorious for being among the most stagnant and underdeveloped in Europe. Likewise, no one can pretend that the highlands and islands in Scotland and the south-east of England share an optimal currency area—yet they share the pound, and both are affected by the decisions of the Chancellor and the Bank of England.

Of course there will be regional differences within the currency area of the new euro, but there are equally great differences within the existing nation states in terms of economic competitiveness, growth and unemployment. We find all those differences in the existing national currency areas. Just as the pound and the lira must respond to the different economic conditions and prospects in Britain and Italy respectively, so the new euro will have to respond to regional differences in the countries that sign up to the new single currency.

There will be one absolutely vital advantage: unlike the Bank of England which, as far as I know, has no voice representing the interests of the highlands and islands, the new European central bank will have representatives from all the nations that sign up to the new euro. Its decisions will therefore be properly representative of all the

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

conditions across the currency area and will not be dominated by a single economic centre, whether it be London or Frankfurt.

Another argument commonly used against monetary union is that Europe is increasingly stagnant and uncompetitive economically and that such stagnation is made worse by the need to deflate European economies in order to meet the single currency criteria on inflation and borrowing. It is astonishing how widely that pessimistic and gloomy view of Europe has spread beyond its natural home on the Tory Back Benches and into the media. However, if we examine the statistics, we see that the reverse is true.

If we take the European Union as a whole and take its currencies as a single currency, we find that last year the European Union enjoyed growth of 2.5 per cent., that European Union inflation was below 3 per cent. and that it enjoyed a trade surplus of $145 billion. Indeed, were it not for the UK, the trade surplus would have been even greater. Europe has had a trade deficit in only three of the past 15 years.

I believe that that record, in terms of trade, competitiveness, growth and productivity, compares favourably with that of the United States, for example, which is often put forward by Euro-sceptics as a model to which we should be aspiring. They are the real facts that the Euro-sceptics and Euro-pessimists have consistently failed to address. I believe that it is in Europe's interest to form a single currency, provided that the convergence criteria can be met, and that it is in Britain's interest to join that single currency. When the Labour Government come to make their judgment in two years' time, I am confident that—provided the convergence criteria are met—they will reach the same conclusion.

8.22 pm

Mrs. Edwina Currie (South Derbyshire): I am delighted to be called relatively early in this two-day debate and put on record my pleasure in the fact that we are having this debate. It is about time that the importance of European issues was recognised by the business managers in the House. It took a lot of effort to get a two-day debate, and I hope the fact that nearly 100 Members have asked to be called to speak is taken into account when such matters are next discussed. Indeed, I hope that we are setting a precedent and that future European Council meetings are preceded—preferably in good time—by a two-day debate in the House, which will give far more of us an opportunity to be called.

The Father of the House, who spoke earlier, was absolutely right. It is about time that members of our Front-Bench team spoke far more positively about Europe. What worries me is that by not doing so, Cabinet members and members of important Ministries and Departments such as the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury are making a rod for their own backs or, indeed, for our backs. Where no enthusiasm is expressed about the European Union and its developments, doubt will tend to creep in; and if no information is made available, even from the Government, about any proposals—their complexity and their advantages and disadvantages—anxiety takes its place. Doubt and anxiety are now the prevailing emotions that pervade much of the discussion in the country at large.

I should like to hear from every member of the Cabinet the same type of robust speech in defence of Europe that we have heard from the Chancellor today and, indeed, in the past few weeks. Would it not be wonderful if the Home Secretary spoke in favour of the European Court of Justice? Would it not be absolutely terrific if the Secretary of State for Social Security made positive suggestions as to how the unfunded pension liabilities of our colleagues overseas might be dealt with, and if he made available to them details of our experience in a friendly and constructive tone? We would gain a tremendous amount in this country and overseas if we adopted that approach.

In particular, I should like to hear far more Conservative Members and Ministers talk about how we gain from membership of the European Union. I should like to hear the same from Opposition Front Benchers. In the next few weeks, as we go into the general election, I hope that the Opposition do not start to back off; indeed, I look to one or two Labour colleagues who I see nodding at me to ensure that it does not happen.

Membership of the European Union is especially relevant to my constituency. The unemployment rate in South Derbyshire is 4.5 per cent. That must be one of the lowest rates in any industrial area in Europe, perhaps anywhere on the entire continent. It is partly due to the advent of Toyota, which has brought the largest inward investment that Europe has ever seen. In my area, it means jobs and exports. In fact, the United Kingdom has had the lion's share of inward investment to Europe from outside, and we ought to make it absolutely clear why that is so.

What we have tended to hear from the Government is that we have gained that inward investment because the UK is different from the rest of Europe. I should like to hear them say that it is because the UK is a member of the European Union and that, were we not, Toyota would not have given us a second glance—nor would most of the other overseas companies that have invested so heavily in us and are still doing so. We must make it clear that it is because we are a member of the European Union that these companies come to us. We must never let anyone in government, or out of it, forget that.

I am absolutely certain that Toyota did not come here because of a flexible exchange rate or because we were in or out of the exchange rate mechanism. Such considerations are not part of its planning. Much of our current economic strength is due not to the fact that we are in or out of the ERM but to the inward investment that has brought not only money but skills, management, jobs and imagination and the exports which it generates and which help to improve our situation.

As for the single currency—

Mr. David Shaw: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Currie: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me, but there is not time.

As for the single currency, I am convinced that it will happen. From what I see on the continent, people are planning for it far more vigorously than we are. I am also convinced that it will work. I sometimes hear colleagues talk about foreigners as if they were all stupid. I have to say that most are not as stupid as some Members of this House. We ought to take into account the fact that they are planning carefully for what is going to happen in a couple of years' time.

My concern is that a single currency might work too well. I fear that if a group of extremely strong countries with very high levels of foreign exchange reserves—Germany's foreign exchange reserves, for example, are twice as high as the UK's, and ours are tending to fall rather than rise—got together in a currency union, they would have a very strong currency indeed. Colleagues in the Bundesbank are quite mistaken if they fear that the single currency will be a weak currency. As I have said, I fear, and I believe that they should fear, that it will be a very strong currency, stronger even than the deutschmark. That would be rather worrying, given the lack of competitiveness which is a problem in much of Europe.

People who do not want monetary union—I refer especially to Conservatives—should make it absolutely clear why they do not want it. In all the kerfuffle about dominance by Germany and in all the talk about democracy and the nation state, they fail to admit, and are shy of coming to grips with, the fact that the one policy option that would disappear were we to adopt the euro would be the option to devalue. It is an option which we have used extensively during my lifetime and which, I believe, we should abandon.

Devaluation means fiddling with our currency. At the least opportunity, or under the least pressure, Tory and Labour Governments have tended to debase our currency. The net result is that my constituents work just as hard as they did 10 years ago—indeed, they work with a higher percentage of capital investment than they did 10 years ago—but when they go abroad their precious sterling buys less than it did 10 years ago. Even though our currency has appreciated in recent weeks, it still costs them more to live in this country, because interest rates are increasing. Our interest rates are twice those of countries which it is widely believed will join the euro, and where devaluation is not a policy.

If the Government move any further to rule out our joining the single currency in the next Parliament or at any future point, they will have a problem with members of the Conservative party such as me. I have been a member for 30 years, but if the Government were to decide to shift from a policy of wait and see, I could not be a candidate at the next election. I defend the policy of wait and see: it is entirely sensible, as we do not yet know how the currency will work and which countries will join. It is right that, as we approach the election, we should say that, until we have more information, it would be unwise to make a decision.

We should be a core nation of the European Union. This nation will pay a great price if we do not join the single currency, provided that it is well run. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) said, the option is open to us now, but it may not be open to us when the single currency is in existence. Once it has been created, the option may be removed. We had the option to join the Common Market in the first place, but we refused and were then denied entry for 18 years. We should take that very seriously.

I say to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench, "Please, this far and no further. Don't budge any further towards the Euro-sceptics. You won't win a single vote, and you will not do this party, this Government or this country any good by shifting." If the Government shift any further, this lady at least will not be fighting in South Derbyshire. When so many jobs depend on us being at the heart of Europe in the future, I cannot explain to my constituents why the Government have become Euro-sceptic. That is not the way forward, and it is not a view that I can accept.

8.31 pm

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): I endorse the point made by the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie) about the two-day debate. A debate on the pros and cons of EMU, the stability pact and such matters is welcome and long overdue.

I support the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) about the way in which the debate on Europe has been conducted so far. The xenophobia and nationalism that has come through has brought Parliament and this country into disrepute. We can never support such behaviour. I hope that from now on debates will be conducted better than they have been.

I want this country to join the single currency on 1 January 1999. I believe that the benefits far outweigh the disadvantages. The single currency is unstoppable: it is bound to happen. The momentum behind it is immense.

The system must operate successfully. The euro must be a hard currency. We do not want a currency that is susceptible to speculation. All the member states that participate must have good monetary and economic discipline. The stability pact is not only desirable but essential to ensure that each member state acts responsibly, so that the single currency works successfully.

Both the major parties are in a wait-and-see situation. Some of the negotiations on the stability pact are still uncertain. They may argue that it is necessary to wait and see, but the Chancellor told us that the discussions in ECOFIN have gone far beyond what I imagined, and the whole package for EMU and a single currency seems to have already been tied up.

It is extraordinary that we have not yet debated the advantages and disadvantages of a single currency. I should like to use the few minutes available to me to list some of them, so that they are on the record. The obvious advantage is that traders and tourists would not have to change currencies. Currently, that equivalent to a trade tax amounts to about £3 billion per annum. A single currency would allow us to improve the profits of small businesses in particular. The consequence of a single currency would be a boost in trade between Britain and the other countries of the European Union.

Any business—especially a small business—needs stable exchange rates. That is an important requirement. Businesses can keep their costs under control, invest in the best technology and equipment and employ skilled and educated people, but a nasty fluctuation in the exchange rate can wipe out their profits, and possibly the businesses. I see hon. Members nodding in agreement, who, like me, have run businesses. It is a swamping factor. In the 1980s, under the Thatcher Government, we had huge rises in the value of sterling, which caused havoc for many small traders.

When companies submit bids for competitive tenders, they have to allow for such fluctuations. Their bids become less competitive because of the need to guarantee their business against fluctuations. When companies lose contracts, they lose jobs. The great advantage of a single currency is that companies are not susceptible to speculation.

[Mr. Stuart Randall]

What would be the advantages for a small company in west Hull, which is near the Dutch coast? There is a North sea ferry across the channel. I would like such a small business in my constituency to be able to trade as easily with a company in Rotterdam as it does with a company in Leeds or Manchester. It would then be able to exploit the huge and exciting single market. That would not only boost the profits and business opportunities of that company in Hull, but create many jobs in my constituency.

If we had a single currency, we would be able to open up the single market, which has been extraordinarily successful. We want to take advantage of the single market, but we can do that only when we have a single currency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill), who is not present at the moment, made a valid point about prices. Groups of pensioners go to Spain every winter for the sunshine and warm weather. The prices in the shops are in pesetas, so they do not know whether a product is cheaper or more expensive than it is at home. They need to know what the current rates are, and they need a calculator to work it out. With a single currency, they would be able to determine whether the prices in Spain were good or bad. That would lead to competition, and would bring great benefits to consumers. Economic and monetary union would have the great advantage of bringing prices down.

Another important benefit of the euro would be lower interest rates. British long-term rates are estimated to be about 1.5 per cent. greater than the rates in Germany and France, because the markets believe that the British economy is susceptible to higher inflation. Therefore, countries using the euro will be seen to be a lower risk, so we can expect lower interest rates.

For too long, Britain has been bedevilled by a bust-boom economy, and our competitors have been able to enjoy appreciably lower interest rates and lower inflation than ourselves. They have also been able to sustain those lower rates. With the European central bank, we can build on such experience in our competitor countries in the EU. The European central bank will provide a great opportunity for a euro zone, by ensuring that we can perform as well as our competitors. As a consequence, businesses will be able to make long-term investments without worrying about huge fluctuations in interest rates, and that will lead to greater investment.

Opting out of the single currency will leave us isolated. Experts to whom I have spoken have said that Germany and France will join by 1999 and that Benelux, Austria and Ireland will all join, leaving Britain, apart from Denmark, isolated. We would incur substantial costs, in terms of both lost investment and higher interest rates, if we were not part of the euro. Therefore, I appeal to all hon. Members to push for our membership of the euro by 1999.

8.41 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): A joke going around Westminster at present suggests that the arguments of the Euro-realists somehow undermine the national interest. As I mentioned to the Prime Minister the other day, I hope that we can all keep a sense of humour about this matter. It is important and serious, but I hope that we can keep a sense of humour and remain even-tempered. As I said last year at the time of the leadership election, it is important that we should talk to one another rather than at one another.

At the heart of the fudges within fudges and the arguments that we have heard so often today there is the question of the Maastricht treaty itself. That is why we are in such incredible difficulty and why it is now so difficult for many people who subscribed to it and whipped it through to admit that it went wrong. They now face the consequences of what was decided at that time.

The problem was that we said that we would never use our veto to prevent the other member states going ahead. Therefore, as I said in a paper that I was asked to write for the Conservative party's manifesto committee in 1991, we put ourselves on the outer tier of a two-tier Europe, where we would be marginalised, lose influence and be dominated by other countries, including Germany.

I am quite prepared to say that at that time I was simply trying to analyse or predict what might happen. I thought that I was right. But we now have the concrete evidence to demonstrate the veracity of the arguments that were presented during the Maastricht debates, in which, with hindsight, many people today would have liked to take part.

When we consider the exchange rate mechanism and its effect on the British economy, the riots and the disorder in other parts of the continent and the difficulty—I would say impossibility—of convergence, one is bound to ask whether that artificial construction is not based on something that could be described as an economical and political lie.

It is impossible to achieve the criteria because the convergence is impossible. Therefore, within the fudge within a fudge that we are now experiencing, we are being drawn deeper into a quagmire simply because of the lack of the realisation and acceptance that this is not merely a question of assertion, but a question of evidence. Furthermore, it is a question of principle.

In the Select Committee on European Legislation in February this year, I put it to the Foreign Secretary that economic and monetary union is surely a matter of principle. He replied that he did not follow my point. Many British people would be extremely surprised to hear that. It is a matter of principle on which we must sustain the national interest.

The national interest is undermined by our refusal to accept that the consequences of the single currency, the movement towards political union—which is infinitely more important than these artificial arguments dancing on the head of a pin about fudges within fudges and whether we shall be able to achieve the criteria—are ultimately about our democracy.

It is a great tribute to the House that this debate is taking place at all. It was precisely because, following the suggestion of the Select Committee on European Legislation, there was a genuine coalition, in the national interest, of people who refused to accept that there should not be a debate on the stability pact, that we have had this debate. Interestingly—I pay tribute to them—that coalition was made up of federalists and anti-federalists; people from all sides of all parties who joined together. We proved the point that our democracy in the national interest is at the heart of the reason why we are taking the position that we do on this European question.

Another point connected with that is that in Europe the stability pact has, as a result of this victory for the House of Commons, been restrained, if not stopped—in other words, vetoed by the House of Commons. Mr. Chirac may now be beginning to flex his muscles on the stability pact, precisely because he knows that, with the scrutiny reserve under the resolution of 1990, the stability pact has been put on hold. We were told last Thursday by the eminently wise Leader of the House that the matter will be shunted forward possibly, perhaps probably, to Amsterdam next year. The bottom line is that the stability pact has been put on hold with the opportunity for us to examine this matter by virtue of a democratic decision taken by the House.

The intergovernmental conference in Dublin will have to consider the questions of defence and foreign policy and their dreadful implications, on which I am sure that the Government will take a tough line, as I hope they will on the 48-hour week and on quota hopping. But given the importance of the single currency issue and its direct relationship with Britain's ability to govern itself, it is essential that the matter is properly discussed at the intergovernmental conference. In an intervention on my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I made the point that it is all very well talking about negotiations at the table, which was the basis on which our party conference gave him and my right hon. and learned Friend Foreign Secretary a standing ovation, but, as the transcript of the Prime Minister's "On the Record" interview on Sunday clearly shows, they did not explain that, in this context, being at the table means the preparations in the European Monetary Institute, which are determined by qualified majority vote. That is the difference.

All the suggestions, which permeate the interview, that somehow or other we can veto and stop the arrangements, are simply not accurate. We are not properly negotiating the question of a single currency. The issue is fundamentally being dealt with in the European Monetary Institute, which is the preparatory stage and which, at the same time, does not prevent us from being able to extricate ourselves from the mess that the Maastricht treaty put us in.

It is no good people saying that the Euro-realists, the Euro-sceptics or even—if they care to call us this—the Europhobes are marginalising us and putting us on the sidelines, when it was the protocol in the third stage of the Maastricht treaty which said that, legally, we would never prevent the other member states from going ahead, which effectively allowed the surge of federalism to drive forward. That is precisely where we are now.

It is of the greatest concern that the "On the Record" interview does not seem to deal with the fundamental question that we should be considering in relation to where we are going on monetary union as a whole. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said, I think—he is here now, so I have an opportunity to test this—that about 70 per cent. were in favour of a single currency. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps I have got it wrong. My right hon. and learned Friend will no doubt correct me.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I think that about 70 per cent.—and I confess that I was speaking from memory—say that they are in favour of keeping the option open.

Mr. Cash: If, to put it another way—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that the 10 minutes are up.

8.52 pm

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I have been in the House only a short time—not yet three years—but tonight has been a remarkable occasion because, since I entered the House, to be openly pro-European in Westminster meant feeling very much in a minority. *[Interruption.]* I meant in SW1, not in the House of Commons. I do not know what the House's view is, but in SW1, on television, Europhobes pant against Europe and in my newspapers, most of the pundits rant against it. I do not even quite know what is the line of my own preferred paper, *The Guardian*, on Europe.

Everyone can be in favour of some sludgy Europe, but when core decisions have to be taken—and in all honesty the only one that faces Britain in the next few years will be the next stage of European construction, which will involve economic and monetary union—even many of the so-called pro-Europeans tend to fade away into oblivion or find all the reasons why they are against taking a tough decision.

That is a hard decision. The decision was hard in 1950 when we did not go into the Schumann plan. It was hard in 1957 when we scorned the treaty of Rome. It was hard perhaps in 1962 when General de Gaulle was willing to make a deal with Harold Macmillan, provided that Mr. Macmillan distanced himself somewhat from subordination to the United States. Mr. Macmillan said no. That may have been the correct decision at the time, but the hard decision was fudged.

When finally the decision was taken in the early 1970s, it was massively endorsed in 1975 at the referendum. A set of interesting opinion polls were taken in the early 1980s when the British people, by three to one, said that they wanted to withdraw from Europe, let alone be part of a single currency. Withdrawal was the policy offered to the British electorate by my party in 1983 and the opposite policy was offered by the Conservative party—fat lot of good it did us.

This has been an interesting debate because, for the first time perhaps, the House of Commons—and I think probably the majority of Members reflect this—is saying no to the Europhobes, to the pundits and to the foreign press proprietors, and yes to the fact that the British people's interests lie in being in Europe and—if it is in our interests, as I believe it is—in playing a full part in the next construction of Europe.

I pay tribute to the Chancellor of the Exchequer because, apart from some rather jejune, boilerplate, anti-Labour stuff at the end of his speech, he offered a lead. He discussed in an adult and mature way the technical problems, the economic difficulties and the issues that are at stake.

I am looking forward to the winding-up speech of the Budget Master General, or whatever his new title is, because, in his interesting exchange with the shadow Chancellor, he did not deny that he said on television that he is a Euro-sceptic. A Euro-sceptic on the Conservative Benches means someone who is hostile to Europe, not someone who is sceptical about aspects of Europe—all of us are. It means someone who is in the Euro-sceptic and

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

Europhobe camps. When he rises to his feet, he may dissemble—I think that that is the new parliamentary verb for facing both ways at once—but I want the Budget Master General to tell us whether he stands by his Chancellor, or whether he is going to run with what appears to be the majority of his party.

Sir Leon Brittan made the point passionately this week in his semaphored intervention from Singapore on Radio 4's "Today" programme. In effect, down on his knees, the former Home Secretary was saying to his party, "Grow up and get real because Britain's standing around the world"—forget Europe—"is declining as this broken-backed Government have to rely on one man—the Chancellor—to tell the truth about our future in Europe."

I found some of the Chancellor's remarks about the details of his negotiations most interesting because, in effect, we are seeing the tragedy of this once great party. It now has to speak a double language: one language negotiating the patriotic interests of Britain with our partners in Europe and another for *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*, in which the inducement of saying no to the single currency and no to Europe has to be offered to keep the rebellious troops in their place. I really would like a clear answer from the Europhobes.

Yesterday, I discussed the issue on television with the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), who had the courage to resign from the Government because of his opposition to the single currency. He was asked whether he was against the single currency on constitutional or sovereignty grounds. He replied that he could not decide what Parliament would do in five or 10 years' time. So, are we talking about a matter of sovereignty or a calendar?

Let the anti-Europeans make their position clear. There are two or three of them in the Labour party. They have given long and distinguished service to our party and our country and, sadly—I think that is the appropriate adverb—they will be retiring at the next election. They will be replaced by Labour party candidates who are sceptical about much of what happens in Europe, but profoundly believe that Britain's place is in Europe, that we have to work with our European partners and that the best interest of our nation is served not by standing outside, but by playing a full part in the next stage of European construction. In contrast, all the incoming Conservative candidates are anti-European.

This is not just a matter of the single currency; it concerns the future of Britain. Our country has at its essence the need to play a full part in the new global economy. If we are outside Europe, we shall not be new merchant venturers, but isolated also-rans. All the surveys suggest that inward investment is wholly predicated on the fact that Britain is a member of the European Union. If we withdraw from the European Union—as half the Conservative party would have us do—that inward investment will dry up and factories in Derbyshire, Sunderland and elsewhere will be relocated to elsewhere in the world's greatest single market.

I have long been in favour of a referendum. I do not want to lance the boil, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) said; I want to drain the poison that has destroyed the ability of the House—and I fear that of the Government—to take the best decision in the interests of our people. When that referendum comes, let us be quite clear that it will be on the future of Britain and whether we are in or out of the European Union. I have no fear of that question being put to the British people and I am quite confident about the result.

I say that from a position on the left. The Conservatives drove unemployment to unprecedented heights and have reduced it through devaluation, debauching our currency and driving wages down so far that people cannot earn enough even to afford to pay income tax. Until we learn some of the lessons not of Germany, which had to accommodate reunification, which is distorting its economy, or France, which needs labour market reform—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Time is up.

9.2 pm

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I am delighted to speak in this evening's debate. As the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) suggested, I am one of those who signed the European Movement policy statement that appeared in *The Times* on Monday. That statement accorded with much of the Government's position on many of the major issues that now confront the European Union.

I am no more a Euro-federalist than the great majority of Conservatives in the House or the country, but I wish to see the United Kingdom play a full role in a union of sovereign nation states. By full role, I mean that we should cease to play Eeyore at every possible opportunity. I have no doubt that the unhelpful policies adopted by the EU over bovine spongiform encephalopathy have been backed much more enthusiastically by some countries that are aghast at our frequently obstructive attitude.

Today's debate is principally about the economic issues facing the EU, particularly the single currency. I am pleased that we have started to discuss the practicalities of a single currency rather than simply indulging in polemics.

Yesterday, I and a number of right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House enjoyed a working lunch with senior members of the retail industry. They expressed their aspirations and fears about the changeover to a single currency should the United Kingdom decide to join such a currency. They did not express a view either way as to whether we should or should not join, but they identified the possible difficulties of training staff, educating customers and reprogramming cash-handling equipment. They pointed out the considerable advantages of a "big bang" approach—a direct changeover rather than running two currencies in parallel.

The retailers pointed out how unsuitable a date 1 January would be, as it falls in the middle of their busiest time of year. Mid-February or mid-October would be much better, they said. They asked for national and international consultation, and I trust that that will happen, for the retail industry will need at least three years' lead-in time to make a smooth transition to a single currency. They were particularly worried about over-prescriptive arrangements for pricing, especially unit pricing. Our retail friends were, however, able to appreciate the advantages that the low on-costs in Britain would have on much more transparent pricing across Europe. Lower prices in Britain could significantly benefit British retailers.

The discussion with people who will have to adapt their businesses to the introduction of a single currency if—or more likely, when—it occurs was very useful and practical. It was also a good example of why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been absolutely right to keep the British option open to the point where the whole scheme and its regulations and mechanisms will be negotiated and agreed. The Maastricht opt-out negotiated by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) was indeed precious.

I am no great economist and do not pretend to be able to foresee the macro-economic consequences of a single currency, but I am not alone. In June, I attended a Confederation of British Industry conference on business in Europe. Some of the great panjandrums of British industry were there, telling the Government that they had to give a great lead to our push for European business.

Somewhat imprudently I asked those great leaders for a lead from industry on whether the United Kingdom should join a single currency in the first wave. There was a nervous coughing and spluttering into their sleeves by the chairmen of BA—British Airways—BP, BT, and B almost everything else, but answer came there none, for there is no certainty even among the major companies represented in the CBI about whether we should join.

No one knows what impact our participation—or perhaps our non-participation—in the first wave will have on the City, which is Europe's and possibly the world's pre-eminent financial centre. It would indeed be surprising if some of EMU's fiercest critics were not to be found in the ranks of foreign exchange dealers—self-interest is probably viewed as a quality in those circles.

What I do know is that if the Government had closed the possibility of the UK joining a single currency before May 2002—the probable end of the next Parliament—and a single currency introduced by our partners in our absence had a seriously deleterious effect on the City's complex but vital markets, the British Government would have been grossly negligent in their duty to do what is best for Britain.

There is great uncertainty about the impact on various aspects of our economy of a properly constituted single currency scheme. Will it lead to substantial employment migration from the poor south in Europe to the prosperous north? With falling unemployment in the UK at present and rising unemployment elsewhere, such migration could and may be taking place now—hence blond, blue-eyed Finnish nurses in Hackney. Employment migration certainly takes place in the United States from time to time.

Resource transfer from northern to southern Europe, or in future to new entrant countries in eastern Europe, might be necessary to turn back that tide, but employment and resource adjustments are more a feature of the single market than the prospect of a single currency. They will happen whether the UK joins a single currency or not. EMU would not limit Parliament's powers to tax and spend, although it would prevent future Governments from avoiding the consequences of their decisions. We could choose to be a low-tax, low-spending economy or a high-tax, high-spending economy. We could not be a high-spending, low-tax economy and cover the deficit by borrowing or monetisation—but only an irresponsible Government would want to do that.

Britain has been remarkably successful in attracting investment into Europe from outside Europe, as several of my hon. Friends have said, and 40 per cent. of American and Japanese investment comes here. The European operations of three Japanese second or third-line companies are located in my constituency, partly for Gillingham's unique connections with Japan but mainly for the reasons why so much inward investment comes to the UK: the English language, benign company and individual tax regimes, a flexible and relatively well-trained work force, low social on-costs for labour, and so on. Above all, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie) said, companies from the US, Japan and other major far eastern countries set up their European operations here because we are in Europe. Those of my hon. Friends who advocate staying clear of any closer links with Europe, whether economic or political, and furthermore advocate a progressive disengagement from Europe, neglect to tell us what might happen to the hundreds of thousands of jobs already created here by inward investment or to such investment in the future, if their proposals were adopted.

For my part, I am convinced that it remains the duty of the Government to fight for Britain's interests in a Europe to which it fully contributes; to exercise our privileged position of opt-out or opt-in to a single currency at the proper moment; and to retain the possibility of reconsideration at a later date if we decide not to join in the first wave. It is a wise politician who never says never. The United Kingdom should have learnt the lesson of Messina. Joining someone else's club without the opportunity to contribute to the rule book always means being a second-class member.

9.10 pm

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North–East): The hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) made an interesting speech, but the question that I wish to raise at the conclusion of today's debate is what sort of nation we want Britain to be in the future. Those in the Conservative party who attack the Prime Minister's policy frequently tell us what they do not want our future to be. They do not want us to be part of a federal European super-state ruled from Brussels, and we can all agree with that, but what they do not tell us is what sort of nation they do want us to be. Like it or not, Europe and the world are changing and we must change as well. We cannot stay as we are because our role in the world will change and the question is what we want that change to be. Conservative Members sometimes give the impression not only that they want our role to stay as it is now, but that they want it to return to what it was 100 years ago. That will not happen. We must be realistic in making a shrewd assessment of the future role that Britain can play in the world.

Let us suppose that we stay out of European monetary union for good. Most European countries will join it and it will extend to much of Europe the success that the deutschmark has enjoyed in Germany since the war, with low inflation and low interest rates. The euro will stand alongside the dollar and the yen as one of the world's three main currencies.

If we stand outside and stick with the pound, what will be our place in the world? Some 20 minutes away through the channel tunnel, one of the world's strongest currencies will be operating. More than half our international trade

[Mr. Stephen Timms]

will be with the euro zone. We will have higher inflation, as we do now, and given the tradition of devaluation that has continued to flourish since 1979, we will have higher interest rates, as we also do now. Is not the reality that we would be locked into permanent economic weakness?

We have a poor record on investment, which is at the heart of our current economic weakness, and the weakness of our currency against the whole euro zone will simply make matters worse. It is true that we have captured a large share of the investment coming from outside Europe, but the benefits of that are dwarfed by the problems of the small investment in the United Kingdom by ourselves, so that our total level of investment is much smaller than elsewhere and much less than it should be. Permanently higher interest rates in the UK than in the whole euro zone will simply make matters worse.

It is not only our economic prospects that will be so gloomy if we stay for ever outside monetary union. We need to square up to the much wider question of our role in the world and, indeed, our sovereignty. Given economic and monetary union, Europe's main economic decisions will be made in Frankfurt. We will inevitably follow whatever is decided there because our trade is so dominated by countries in the euro zone. If we are not in the monetary union, we will have no say whatever in those decisions, but we will be profoundly affected by them. Surely the sovereignty argument, which is frequently articulated by Conservative Members, pushes us to be inside monetary union rather than outside it, because at least that way we will have a say in the most important decisions about our economy which, as I say, will be made in Frankfurt whether we are there or not.

I submit that being a committed member of a strong European Union—pooling our sovereignty in some areas in order to exercise our influence through the European Union and seeking to win the arguments about how Europe should be run—presents an attractive future for Britain. That approach would retain for Britain in the new millennium the influence that we have enjoyed in the latter part of this one, but in a modern form that can prosper in the new conditions of the world economy.

That will work only if the governing party ceases to be rent asunder by people arguing that we should not be involved. As the Prime Minister recognised on Sunday and again yesterday, he cannot win the arguments in Europe with the current shambles at home. Given a consensus in the governing party, participation in Europe—including in monetary union—holds out an attractive future role for our nation consistent with our history and with the reality of our current strength as the home of just 0.5 per cent. of the world's population.

What sort of future role do those who want us to stay outside monetary union or to leave the European Union want Britain to have? We know that they do not want Britain to be in a federal super-state, but what do they want? Some, undoubtedly, want Britannia to start ruling the waves again. My suspicion is that their position is based on an unrealistic view of Britain's place in the world. If that is not what they aspire to, what do they aspire to?

The realistic alternative to membership of economic and monetary union is for Britain to be the Canada of Europe. I am not denigrating that option. We need to have a cool debate about the realistic possible roles for Britain. Canada has its own currency, but its economy is dominated by the huge and powerful United States economy to the south. It is a great country. Those who argue against economic and monetary union may well want Britain to be the Canada of Europe, but Canada is a bit player on the world stage. What happens in Canada does not set the pace for the rest of the world. Music, fashion and sport from Canada do not set the world ablaze; music, fashion and sport from Britain do. I do not think that the British people want to be consigned to that role. We have much more to offer and much more to gain.

If we allow ourselves to keep our own weak currency and our economy is dominated, as it will be, by the strong European currency over which we have no influence, damage will be done not just to our economy but to our role in the world. By exercising influence through Europe, we can retain a role consistent with reality and with our history.

Playing a full part in Europe also holds out the prospect of a decent future for all our people, not of large numbers sliding into ever greater disadvantage compared with the few. As my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said earlier, that is why the trade union movement supports monetary union. It was striking that of all the major institutions to give evidence on monetary union to the Treasury Select Committee, the Trades Union Congress was the most supportive of the project.

It may not be possible for us to join monetary union at the outset, but we should not fool ourselves that sitting around and waiting to see how it works out before deciding whether to join will solve the problems. All the Chancellor's concerns about giving up our seat at the table would then arise again and the union that we eventually joined would have been completed in our absence. Missing the first wave and going in late would cause serious problems, as the Treasury Select Committee report points out.

I should like to comment briefly on the recent alarm about unfunded pension liabilities in other European countries. That is a red herring. There are plenty of ways of dealing with the problem without damaging the United Kingdom economy. It is certainly not a reason for us not to enter the single currency.

I represent an east London constituency, which has the characteristics eloquently described by my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). My constituents in Newham are looking forward with optimism to a future with closer links with Europe. We are looking forward to the construction of the channel tunnel rail link, with an international station at Stratford, and to the subsequent investment in the area from European countries. The United Kingdom economy has not provided the opportunities that my constituents should have had. The European economy can provide those opportunities. I want a Government who will grasp and exploit them, rather than one who are poised to throw them away because of their divisions and their fearfulness for Britain's future in Europe.

9.18 pm

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): The speech of the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) underlines the reality demonstrated by this debate—that there is, across the House, strong support for a positive

and constructive relationship with Europe and for maintaining our option to enter or stay out of a single currency. Clearly, the Labour and Conservative parties have sizeable minorities who are hostile to Europe. We have seen a document signed by 50 Labour Members of Parliament who express that opinion, and I imagine that a similar number of Conservative Members share their views. But they are not the majority, and they have been made to appear so by the press—about which so much has been heard in this debate, and rightly so.

We are halfway through this important debate—which I greatly welcome—and its value has been demonstrated. The real voice of the House of Commons needs to be heard above the xenophobia and paranoia to which we have grown accustomed over the past two or three years. We have now been able to see a little of what the Euro-sceptics actually believe in. In my view, scepticism is not a genuine political position—one must believe in something.

We have seen a series of contradictions from the sceptics on both sides of the House. They believe, for example, that a single currency will not work and that it is a leaky ship. They think that it will be a disaster, and they may well be right. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has pointed out, it could conceivably turn out as they say. I think that that is unlikely, for reasons on which I shall touch in a moment. But those who say that this is a hopeless cause, a leaky ship and a dreadful mechanism that will impose terrible and insupportable burdens on our economy and will make us pay money that we do not have cannot have it both ways.

The sceptics in my party cannot claim to be good Conservatives, and I speak as someone with dry, right-wing credentials—that is, I believe in good housekeeping and all the other good monetary disciplines that are, to a degree, enshrined in the Maastricht criteria. I do not believe that any country can devalue its way into prosperity, and experience over the last generation has demonstrated that. Yet my hon. Friends—who, in months and years gone by, seemed to share those views—now reject them because the views have been embraced by the nasty, suspicious and scheming continentals. It does not negate the sanctity of those principles if other people have now discovered—albeit belatedly—that they are good ideas.

Frequently, the German bogey is brought out of the box. The fear is that, having failed in two world wars, this is the way in which the Germans will achieve domination over western Europe to start with and eastern Europe the day after tomorrow. Oddly enough, the German people seem unconvinced of that and, at the moment, the majority of German people are deeply suspicious. Some 60 per cent. or 70 per cent.—depending on which opinion poll one believes—have yet to be convinced by their political leaders that joining a single currency is a good idea. If I were a German who had worked hard for 45 or 50 years to maintain and develop a stable and strong economy and a stable and strong deutschmark, I would take a lot of convincing that I should launch the deutschmark into a system with other currencies with less impressive track records.

The Euro-sceptics refuse to face up to many challenges and constantly make negative attacks, but they face a conundrum. What are the other countries up to? Why are seven, eight or nine countries trying every trick in the book—I accept that there are some tricks being played—to get into the single currency?

Those countries live in much closer contiguity to the Germans than we do and they have genuine experience of German domination and understand much more clearly the realities of Germany. But are they stupid? Are they ready to give away their sovereignty, or do they know something that our Euro-sceptics do not know? I suggest that the answer is the latter.

We must also take account of the possibility that those countries are ready to throw away all their achievements, yet the record of many of them over 30 years is better than ours. In 1965, one could get more than DM11 for a pound and now one can get only DM2.30 or DM2.40, or whatever the rate happens to be today. I cannot believe, therefore, that either the Germans or any of the other countries will launch a ship that will sink within a year or two. We shall have to wait and see, but that seems highly unlikely.

The sceptics tell us that our trade opportunities with the rest of the world are wonderful, and I believe that they are, thanks to the Government's stewardship, but we should not forget the balance of trade and the almost 60 per cent. of our trade that is conducted with European Union countries. To put the matter in perspective, we should remind ourselves that our trade with the Netherlands amounts to as much as our trade with the six Asian tigers, China, Indonesia and the Philippines put together, and that our trade with Sweden amounts to as much as our trade with the whole of Latin America.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) suggested that economic success had proved that the United Kingdom could prosper without the single currency, but of course there has not been a single currency. We are dealing with the world as it will be. There is no doubt that, at whatever time and in whatever shape a single currency comes, it will come, so it cuts no ice to suggest that we have done well without it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames also said that he welcomed the opportunity to go it alone in monetary affairs. He had the honour of being Chancellor of the Exchequer. Of all people, surely Chancellors of the Exchequer know that going it alone in monetary affairs is not exactly an option.

On interest rates, it is interesting to note that our borrowing costs are somewhere between £5 billion and £7 billion more than Germany's, because interest rates there are much lower. If we had the German rates, the savings would mean a cut in income tax amounting to £10 a week for the average household. The chances are that a sound single currency will enable us to live with lower interest rates, and we must bear such factors in mind for our constituents' sake.

Some of my hon. Friends say that the majority of people in this country are doubtful and suspicious of the European Union and, more especially, of the single currency. I accept that that is true—it is also true, as I said, in most if not all the countries of the European Union—but it is the job of responsible politicians to lead and educate the electorate and not merely to listen to and follow them.

This debate has demonstrated that, to put it mildly, our minds should be kept open about the beneficial effects of a single currency. It would be a gross dereliction of duty

[Mr. Ray Whitney]

to fail to lead the British people in the paths of common sense simply because Mr. Christopher Booker and the newspaper editors and owners about whom we have heard so much have misled them. I am glad to say that the debate has demonstrated that the majority of right hon. and hon. Members have that common sense, and I hope that we shall hear more of it in the months to come.

9.28 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): This is the debate that the Government did not want. A couple of weeks ago, they tried to sideline debate on crucial issues relating to the stability pact and the single currency to a backstairs Committee. It was only because ordinary parliamentarians, both Government and Opposition, were so outraged at their behaviour that we are having this debate on the Floor. The British constitution relies on the Executive's abstinence from the abuse of power: it gives great power to an Executive with a majority. Members of Parliament protect their right to debate issues. That is the check on Executive power. The Government tried to undermine the rights of Back Benchers by denying them the right to an open debate on the Floor on the single currency documents.

Mr. Marlow: That sounds strange from a Front-Bench spokesman of the Labour party. It has just passed party regulations that mean that anyone who speaks out of line will be thrown out. They all have to be drones and clones in the Labour party now.

Mr. O'Brien: In our party, we have sensible, reasoned debates. One could hardly call the Conservative party's debates sensible or reasonable.

The Government tried to prevent proper debate. Even now, they are trying to deal with the issues through a debate on the Adjournment because they are frightened of a vote that they might lose. They could not pass their resolution in European Standing Committee B and fear that they will be embarrassed on the Floor. They have become so bereft of proper respect for the British constitution that they are prepared to hide their embarrassment about the divisions in the Tory party by frustrating the right of Members of Parliament to debate and vote on fundamental issues. Those who elect us deserve better than that from the Government.

I do not want to criticise the Chancellor of the Exchequer too much; he has had enough criticism from his Back Benchers. In any case, I agree with much of what he said. As he spoke today, we watched the ranks behind him seethe. They were splintering before our eyes. The right hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) referred to the barracking of the Chancellor. The Chancellor was supposed to be speaking for his party, but I suspect that his view was not that of the majority of his Back Benchers. As his speech went on, it seemed more like a personal manifesto—his personal commitment to the European ideal. The exchange with the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood)—in many ways, the personification of Tory divisions—seemed like the first shot in the post-general election leadership campaign. The inevitable conclusion about his speech was that the Chancellor spoke for himself, not for the Government and much less for a majority of the Tory party.

Recent newspaper headlines have expressed the consternation felt by the British people about the fiasco of Tory European policy. One Sunday newspaper called it

"Major's Meltdown—ruin upon ruin and rout upon Tory rout—the kites did not fly, boomerangs exploded and scooters were parked on lawns."

The Sunday Times headline was "Divided we fall" and it had a picture of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, saying:

"Defeated and divided they could wander in the wilderness for years, even decades".

It implied that the Chancellor and the Deputy Prime Minister were more concerned with the post-general election civil war in the Tory party than with the belief that the Tory party, even if the current policy is sustained, would ever be able to take Britain into a single currency.

The Mail on Sunday said:

"thousands of Tory supporters this Sunday morning will be embarrassed and humiliated by the warfare among their party's leaders.

The Mail on Sunday shares that embarrassment and humiliation."

It demanded that the

"Prime Minister should sack Ken Clarke tomorrow."

The Sunday Telegraph headline was "The week John Major's Government fell apart". The following day, *The Independent* said of the Prime Minister's interview:

"All the Prime minister says is . . . 'trust me I'm honest John' . . . He isn't. And there are too many in his party who too obviously don't trust him."

The Prime Minister said that there would be no change in policy, then that there might be, then that there was never any thought of changing it.

The hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) is quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* as saying:

"I am in two minds whether to tell him to stuff his Government and his party."

The hon. Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner) was quoted in the same newspaper as saying, "The strife goes on."

The former Paymaster General—or should I say the former, former Paymaster General?—the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), said that he would tell his constituents that he would vote against a single currency. He is quoted as saying:

"I cannot be expected to regard this as a breach of Party Policy since, as we have been told, there is no Party Policy."

Today, he continued his attack on his Front Benchers.

On Monday, Lord Tebbit said:

"If there is clear division and everybody knows about it, between the Chancellor and the Prime Minister, the Government is in desperate problems."

The *Financial Times* said:

"The electorate will not support a party which puts its own internal squabbles ahead of the national interest."

Mrs. Currie: I am listening to the hon. Gentleman with some care, but some puzzlement. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House are very much in favour of future developments in Europe. We would much rather hear what the Labour Front-Bench spokesman thinks about that.

Mr. O'Brien: If the hon. Lady waits a little while, she may well hear that. I am coming to her.

During the debate today, we heard about the fears of the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie) for her party. She said that, if the policy was to change and the Euro-sceptics got their way, she could no longer stand as a Conservative candidate. That symbolises the strife within the Tory ranks today. Not only have Conservative Members joined the Opposition but some Conservative Members feel that, although they cannot do that, they are no longer prepared to carry the Conservative banner into the next election.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: What is the Labour party's policy on the matter of convergence? Given that the Library reports that Belgium has a national debt of 130 per cent. of GDP, and it is unlikely that that will reduce below the 60 per cent. threshold in time for the first wave of monetary union, does the hon. Gentleman agree that Belgium does not qualify for monetary union? Will he confirm that that is his interpretation of the Maastricht criteria?

Mr. O'Brien: We are talking about sustainable economic convergence. I am not sure why the hon. Gentleman is so vexed. It seems from all his speeches that he has already decided what he is going to do. Why would he bother to get involved in the realities of the debate facing his Chancellor, who is trying to make a reasonably argued case against the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues on the Back Benches who do not support their Chancellor? What about the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), who talked of distrust and betrayal over Europe? He is right, to the extent that there is distrust because the Government put the party before the country. There is betrayal because the Government failed to get the best deal in Europe for Britain.

The Chancellor is not without some support among his Back Benchers. I have already referred to the hon. Member for South Derbyshire. The right hon. Member for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Renton) made an interesting speech in which he warned that we could not assume that there would be a second opportunity to join a single currency.

Many good points were made by my hon. Friends. My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) challenged the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames on his complacency about the City's position. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked whether we wanted Europe to go ahead, leaving Britain behind. My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) gave a timely warning which the Chancellor might like to repeat to some of his Back-Bench colleagues. He said, "Remember when Labour was anti-Europe in the 1980s. A fat lot of good it did us."

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North–East (Mr. Timms) asked what sort of vision for the country the Euro-sceptics have. The answer, he said, was none. They hanker after an old empire—an old Commonwealth. Our future is in Europe, he said. The Tory Euro-sceptics might disagree with that, but, as my hon. Friends the Members for Streatham (Mr. Hill) and for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) pointed out, European co-operation can be both effective and successful for Britain if we get it on the right terms.

My right hon. Friends the Members for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) made strong contributions to the debate on this issue in the Labour party. Let me point out that there are debates within all parties—it would be a poor reflection on our democracy were there not. These questions are of fundamental political importance, which is why we welcome contributions from my right hon. and hon. Friends who question a single currency.

The policy of a Government must be clear and a Prime Minister must lead—the Government owe the British people a clear sense of direction. Debate within a party is fine—it may even be healthy on occasion—but the Prime Minister must give leadership and this Prime Minister, on Europe, has failed to lead. A Labour Prime Minister, with a united shadow Cabinet and backed by a vote within the Labour party supported by 95 per cent. of the party's membership, will have a clear direction, a clear sense of policy and a clear way to lead.

From this Government, we have seen nothing but extraordinary splits, plotting and counter-plotting which extends to the highest reaches of the Tory party. We have a Chancellor who is quoted as talking of "a boomerang wrapped up in high explosive which has rebounded in the Prime Minister's face". The Conservative party is clearly in ferment. The BBC's Mark Mardell said that one Cabinet Minister told him that the party is "in chaos" and that the Chancellor is running policy, not the Prime Minister.

It all started with that now infamous story in *The Daily Telegraph*, that the Prime Minister was trying to push the Chancellor into ruling out a single currency in the next Parliament. Then the Chancellor and the Deputy Prime Minister swung into action: the Prime Minister was brought to heel. In the last week, the Tories have had the smack of firm leadership—not from the Prime Minister, but from the Chancellor. The Chancellor is the nearest the Government have to a leader—a tough and determined fighter for his pro-European beliefs. The Tories have a leader in Downing street—at No. 11. He sets the policy and the terms of government.

The Prime Minister was prepared to buckle under to the sceptics on his Back Benches, but the firm hand of the Chancellor steadied him in the pro-European course. When the Prime Minister, at Prime Minister's questions last Tuesday, tried to appear firm by committing the Government to a clear policy in defiance of his Back Benchers, one could almost see the Chancellor and the Deputy Prime Minister metaphorically standing behind him, exerting a steadying grip on each shoulder—or perhaps around his throat.

Even as the Prime Minister wavered, the strong Europhiles in the Cabinet showed their backbone. As the captain steered toward the rocks, the first mate and the bursar grabbed the wheel and put the ship back on course. The mutinous crew is still mutinous, but it appears that, from now on, the captain will do as he is told by the first mate and the bursar—but I suggest that there will be few votes from the public in favour of taking another passage with a crew so divided and at each others' throats as this one.

It is clear that the Chancellor and the Deputy Prime Minister have imposed on the Cabinet a strategy on the single currency that is closer to Labour's policy than to the view of the majority of Conservative Back Benchers. The Prime Minister is the prisoner of the Chancellor and the Deputy Prime Minister. As my hon. Friend the

[Mr. O'Brien]

Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) implied, there is now clear blue water between the Tory leadership and the Tory party.

We all know the Chancellor's views and those of the Deputy Prime Minister. We know that most Tory Back Benchers broadly disagree with them. We know that the Prime Minister "goes wobbly" from time to time and that the Chancellor has to prop him up. We know that part of the deal is that the Chancellor does not tell us in Parliament what he has really agreed to at ECOFIN, nor can the Prime Minister concentrate on what he agrees at Dublin. Both must tell the House, not what they have done, but what they have not done—that they have not betrayed their Back Benchers. That is how the whole thrust of Government policy on Europe is now directed—to play down any moves towards European agreement and movement forward. They have had to raise isolation to an art form to keep their party together.

The Chancellor claims that binding decisions were not made on monetary union in Brussels on 2 December. The reality is that, with the exception of the definition of "exceptional and temporary" and one or two other small issues, most of the rest of the detail was agreed at various meetings over recent months. There has been a legal base set for the euro and a basis for a new, voluntary exchange rate mechanism. Many of the provisions of the stability pact have been negotiated by the Government.

It is disingenuous to claim that there is no agreement until it is legally binding in June. Either the Government keep the political agreements that they have made or they do not—and most of the agreements have already been made. The idea that it would be practicable for us to reopen all those issues next June is preposterous. The Chancellor is wary of admitting that, because he might exacerbate the civil war in his own party by doing so—yet that civil war goes on.

On Monday, we discovered that the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) planned for a referendum on complete withdrawal from Europe. The former Tory Minister, Sir Leon Brittan, accused the sceptics of damaging Britain. Lord Tebbit has said that 100 Tory candidates are set to defy the leadership in their personal manifestos. The Tory party is split from top to bottom.

Mrs. Gorman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman said that I had decided to introduce a Bill to withdraw from the European Union. That is completely untrue. My Bill proposes renegotiating with the European Union, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will correct what he said.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is responsible for his own speech.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank the hon. Lady for clarifying that point. I accept her clarification, but publicity on the Bill has not been as clear as it should have been.

Labour will fight the next election in favour of constructive engagement in Europe. The Conservatives will claim that that means that we will sell out, but that is just more Tory lies. Labour will defend our national interests in Europe, instead of making a laughing stock of us as the Tories do. Labour opposes a federal state, remembering that those who signed Britain up to the Single European Act at Maastricht were the Tories. Labour will not give up our veto on strategic policies.

Constructive engagement means improving our relationship with our European partners, not squabbling with them for the purposes of domestic party consumption. It means putting British interests at the heart of Europe, not, as the Tories do, playing the British hokey cokey in Europe—in out, in out, shake it all about—a pointless little dance that no doubt placates Euro-sceptics' egos but, by turn, merely irritates and amuses our European partners.

The Government have not put Britain's interests first in Europe; they put their own political survival first. They damage relationships in Europe to please their Euro-sceptic rump. Tory divisions mean that the Prime Minister is selling Britain short. Labour will protect our national interests. We demand that Britain becomes a leading player in Europe: setting the agenda, not failing to do so; winning and not losing the debate; demanding the spotlight, not heckling from the sidelines. Labour will point the way forward for Europe while the Prime Minister wrings his hands in eternal indecision.

We shall ensure that we drive the single market forward in telecommunications, aviation and financial services. Whether Britain is ready to enter economic and monetary union on 1 January will not alter the necessity of our future being in Europe. That is why the current state of the British Government is so damaging to our people. On Europe, the Tory party is divided, disorganised and disgraceful. It is letting down itself, the country and the British people.

It is time to get rid of this tired and discredited Government. This country needs vision, direction and leadership in Europe. It will get all three from new Labour: on economic and monetary union; on the regeneration of the British economy; and on giving Britain increased influence on Europe.

We have seen the Chancellor's struggle to reconcile his views with those of his party—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must settle down.

Mr. O'Brien: The Chancellor's struggle is almost over. He says, "Yes, yes, yes." The Prime Minister says, "Maybe, maybe, maybe." The Tory party says, "Never, never, never." But the British people will say, "Enough, enough, enough—begone."

9.47 pm

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Phillip Oppenheim): In a debate in which hon. Members have had 10 minutes to speak, the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), has taken 19 minutes to wind up. I hope that that will be noted.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) made a series of points with which few people would disagree. He stressed the importance of liberalisation, and said that he was against a united states of Europe and for a referendum on a single currency. Most hon. Members, including my right hon. Friends the Members for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), for Conwy

(Sir W. Roberts), for Guildford (Mr. Howell), and for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Renton) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney), would not disagree with that and made similar good points.

My hon. Friends the Members for South Derbyshire (Mrs. Currie) and for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) made some good and important points about the success of inward investment into Britain in recent years.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) said that the float of sterling in 1992 was a cheat. I think that he implied that markets were cheats, but I do not wish to dwell too long on that aspect. He stressed the need to remain positive members of the European Union, and most hon. Members would agree with that.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), together with my hon. Friends the Members for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) and for Stafford (Mr. Cash) made a series of points from a slightly different angle. Nevertheless, I found plenty to agree with in their comments, although I shall not dwell on them in detail.

My right hon. Friend and predecessor, the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat–Amory), asked whether the transitional costs of moving to a single currency would be taken into account and whether a compliance cost assessment had been made.

Mr. Heathcoat–Amory *rose—*

Mr. Oppenheim: As time is limited, I would appreciate it if I could answer the point. The Government have made it clear that their decision on whether or not to go forward into a single currency will take account of a large number of factors. Transitional costs will be one of those factors. A compliance cost assessment will be made in due course.

Mr. Heathcoat–Amory: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Oppenheim: I hope my right hon. Friend will forgive me. I have very little time. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I have done my best to do so. Very well. I give way.

Mr. Heathcoat–Amory: The Government published a White Paper promising a compliance cost assessment for any regulations brought before the House affecting business costs. Regulations were submitted to the House three weeks ago without a compliance cost assessment. Will my hon. Friend undertake to correct that deficiency at an early date, and not next year?

Mr. Oppenheim: With respect to my right hon. Friend, my point is still valid. Those regulations will not apply to Britain unless we make a decision to go into the single currency. At that point, if necessary, a compliance cost assessment will be made.

The hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) attacked with great vehemence a document entitled "Europe isn't working". He called its claims myths. That document was signed by 50 of his colleagues.

Mr. MacShane: They are all going.

Mr. Oppenheim: That is an interesting insight into the unity on the Opposition Benches.

The hon. Member for North Warwickshire said in his long peroration that his party had sensible and reasoned debates on these matters. The comments of the hon. Members for Streatham and for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) are the denial incarnate of that.

The hon. Member for Streatham said that a single currency would not reduce sovereignty. He said that EMU means lower interest rates, so we should join. How does he know that EMU will mean lower interest rates? We will not know that until we know whether the criteria are being fiddled with and meddled with. That is why the Government's policy of negotiating and waiting until we are clear on these matters is the right policy.

Mr. Marlow: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Oppenheim: I hope my hon. Friend will forgive me. We have limited time. I shall try to give way later.

The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shoré) came in from a slightly different side of the pitch. He said that he did not want foreigners telling us what to do. For an old socialist, there was not much of the brotherhood of man about his comments, but I know that they represent the views of some of his colleagues.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes), by contrast, said that we should go into EMU at all costs. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said that we should not go in at any cost. The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) said that those who want to go into EMU will use any trick to get into EMU. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall), who wants to go into EMU, is probably one of those to whom the right hon. Gentleman was referring.

The hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) said that Euro-sceptics are dangerous. I assume that he includes in his list the right hon. Members for Llanelli and for Bethnal Green and Stepney, and the hon. Member for Walsall, North, who are Euro-sceptics.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Oppenheim: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me for a moment or two longer. I shall give way in a moment.

The hon. Member for Rotherham persists in getting my title wrong, although tonight's performance was a slight improvement on his last effort, when he called me the Posthorn General. He said that I was a Euro-sceptic and therefore I was hostile to Europe. He is right in one respect. I am a Euro-sceptic. That does not necessarily mean that one is hostile to Europe. It means that one is sceptical about Europe. One is pragmatic about Europe. *[Interruption.]* That is not the same thing.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must settle down. The Minister must be given a reasonable hearing.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Oppenheim: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend—who, of course, is a Euro-sceptic; we are sure of that—accept that anyone who says:

[Mr. Cash]

"under no circumstances should the Government rule out participation in a single European currency, now or in the future"

is saying something that is inconsistent with Government policy? Has he noted the advertisement placed by the European Movement, bearing the names of a lot of people who are blaming the Euro-realists but who themselves are inconsistent with Government policy?

Mr. Oppenheim: We Euro-sceptics really should stick together, but I do not necessarily agree with my hon. Friend's premise.

All that this shows is that all the political parties are having a vigorous discussion. There are people who say that we should not have a vigorous discussion, but I think that they are wrong. This is far the most significant issue that we have faced in my 14 years in this place; it is one of the most pivotal issues since the war, and probably in this century. Many people say that it is as important as our decision to join the Community.

I know that many hon. Members feel that it is wrong in principle for us to go into EMU, and that we should say so now. Others take a different view. Whatever the view, the fact is that a single currency will affect us, whether we are in or out.

Some people say that we could just sit on the sidelines and gain some atavistic, mercantilist pleasure from any mess caused by an EMU based on skewed and muddled criteria. Some say that we may even gain advantage from such a mess on the continent—a kind of "capitalism in one country". I am not sure that they are right. More than half our exports go to Europe; United Kingdom companies are major investors in Europe, and vice versa; monetary and political chaos in Europe would probably lead to an over-strong or at least a volatile pound. We must also protect the position of the City, one of our most successful industries.

Those are all reasons why we must be at the negotiations, and why we cannot make a decision until the final shape of EMU is clear. At that point we do have the option to say no, and, even if any Government decided that it was in Britain's interest to go in, the British people would have the final say through a referendum. That is the right policy.

Mr. Marlow *rose—*

Mr. Oppenheim: I know that my hon. Friend is dying to get in, so I will give way, but this is absolutely the last time that I shall do so.

Mr. Marlow: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

Constituents say to me, "Mr. Marlow"—[HON. MEMBERS: "Mr. Marlow!"] Actually, they call me Tony. "Tony," they say, "if we were to join the single currency, would that mean not only that we would lose the pound but that our interest rates would be decided overseas, and that eventually our taxation system would probably be taken over the Europeans?" They say, "Tony, does this effectively mean that we would cease to exist as a nation state?" I reply, "Yes, I believe that that is the case, but I can do better than that: I can ask my hon. Friend the Minister." Does my hon. Friend agree as well?

Mr. Oppenheim: I think that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor answered that point in his speech.

One has to be deeply suspicious of a party that has so lost its soul—that so wants to get its collective snout into the red boxes—that wants power so badly—that it is willing to perform gymnastics with its policies, and play games with an issue as important as the single currency. That is what Labour is doing. On 30 October, the shadow Chancellor said:

"Our policy on the single currency has not changed and will not change."

On 11 November, in a speech to the CBI, he said:

"Labour supports the principle of a single currency."

The Opposition said that their policy on EMU would not change. A few days later, they announced that they would prance along behind us and hold a referendum. Some people say that that was a ploy aimed as much at some of my hon. Friends as at anyone else—*[Interruption.]* I hear one of the shadow Chancellor's hon. Friends say, "Hear, hear." If that is true, it illustrates the cynicism with which the Opposition approach an issue of overriding importance.

I know that the response of some to Labour's latest change of policy is to say, "Let us put clear blue water between the Government and Labour." I am never sure that it is the right tactic, if one is occupying good ground and someone else muscles in, to jump off and swim for it just to put water between oneself and that person. Some would say that a better stratagem would be to chuck them off, but these are questions of judgment and there is clear blue water between the Government and the Opposition, despite the Opposition's attempts to poodle along behind us.

Only yesterday, the shadow Foreign Secretary, who we all know is at one with the shadow Chancellor on these issues—I make that point only to illustrate that we are not the only party that is wholly united on these issues—affirmed that it was Labour policy to surrender Britain's right of veto over key areas such as social, employment, industrial and regional policy—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) says that they are not key areas, but they are. There is clear blue water between the Government and the Opposition. The Opposition want closer union and to take the next big leap forward towards a centralised Europe—that is the difference between them and us.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Medicinal Drugs

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

10 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Medicinal drugs are one of the great triumphs of science. They relieve the pain of millions of people and provide longer, healthier lives. Britain has better safeguards and less drug use—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Hon. Members leaving the Chamber should please do so quietly.

Mr. Flynn: Medicinal drugs are one of the great triumphs of science. They relieve the pain of millions of people and provide healthier, longer lives. In many cases, Britain has higher standards and a lower rate of drug use than many other European countries. Drugs are wonderful servants but fearful masters—if misused, they can be the cause of death or disease on a prodigious scale.

In this short debate, it is possible to give only a few snapshots of the many current concerns, which include the 2,000-plus deaths from prescription and over-the-counter drugs, the over-medication of the elderly in residential homes, the hazards of road users whose senses are dulled by psycho-active drugs, the growing availability of potentially lethal doses of drugs, and, perhaps most important, the worldwide growth of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, which is leading to untreatable forms of ancient diseases. There is also concern about the use of antibiotics on animals and the possibility of their transmission to human beings through the food chain.

I had a message from the Alzheimer's Disease Society tonight. It wants to emphasise the fact that the sad cases illustrated in the recent "World in Action" programme, which showed the misuse of anti-psychotic drugs in residential homes, were not uncommon but are a feature of falling standards in residential and nursing homes. The society asked me to express its support for my call for a full inquiry into drug use.

In March 1996, the *British Medical Journal* gave a very disturbing account of an investigation carried out by researchers in Glasgow into anti-psychotic drugs called neuroleptics. They visited 28 nursing homes and examined the prescribing of what has been called a "chemical cosh" to 217 of the residents. Narcoleptics were considered to be appropriate for only 12 per cent. of them; 190 others had been prescribed them for wholly incorrect reasons—reasons which meant that the homes were probably easier to run but which left the elderly in greater confusion than ever.

The authors concluded that the results were a cause for grave concern, as the drugs have side effects that produce symptoms similar to those of Parkinson's disease. However, the most devastating conclusion of all from the Glasgow researchers was that American studies had proved that, when the use of these powerful drugs was reduced or stopped altogether, even in appropriate cases there was little, if any, deterioration in the patient's behaviour.

The great worldwide threat was illustrated in September in the journal *Nature*, which used language that is rare for a sober scientific journal:

"The increased incidence of penicillin resistant bacteria is putting the treatment of serious childhood diseases in jeopardy . . . multi-resistant TB is becoming the norm".

It reported on the intense frustration of international scientists at a conference in London in the summer at the failure to mount a sustained campaign against what they described as the

"spread of resistance, which is an ecological disaster".

They recommended that we should use antibiotics more sparingly and prudently. The magic bullet that did so much good is losing its potency. A week ago, it was discovered that a disease was being fed and was growing stronger and more virulent on an antibiotic, which is an extraordinary turnabout.

Epidemics are now sweeping the planet. They are far worse in remote lands in Africa and South America. Although they have touched the United States of America, none has affected us to any great extent, with the exception of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus. One bacterium, which is resistant to all known antibiotics, is the principal cause of all childhood deaths in Africa. That is an extremely serious problem. It could appropriately be described as a disaster.

In this city and in this Parliament, our lives were touched by the moving words of Lord Fitt about the death of his wife. He explained that she was suffering from asthma and was taking cortisone, which is a steroid drug. They were worried that she was taking too much of the drug, so she was admitted to hospital to try to get her on to less damaging drugs. Sadly, she shared a ward with someone with MRSA—the lethal hospital bug created by drug over-use. Tragically, Lady Fitt died a few weeks later.

On 16 April this year, the Minister for Health gave me figures on deaths caused by paracetamol. I thank him for that. We have had a long and often heated and angry correspondence, but I think that we now agree about the number of deaths caused by paracetamol. The minimum figure is about 200 a year.

In a recent reply, the Minister gave me the gross figures, which were 452 in 1993, 453 in 1994 and 568 in 1995. That is a huge number of deaths, given that Ecstasy, which everyone is worried about, accounts for 10 deaths a year. Co proximal accounts for 250 deaths a year, dothiepin for 150 deaths, and in America 7,000 deaths a year are caused by aspirin. Those are not drugs to cure life-threatening illnesses: they cure fairly minor illnesses. Drugs that kill people are the familiar, over-the-counter drugs. They are like loaded guns in the medicine chests of almost every home in the land.

Two years ago, a 12-year-old girl in Pontefract was sent out on a trial to buy 50 paracetamol tablets, which was enough to kill her three or four times over. She had no difficulty buying 50, but many people tried to sell her 100. It was not the pharmacists who pushed the drugs the most, but the supermarkets and the garages.

Cheaper, more accessible drugs may be on the way. The Office of Fair Trading is considering the alleged restrictive practice in a first step to abolishing controls on cheaper medicines. A 12-year-old girl may go into Asda and for 25p be able to buy enough paracetamol to kill her twice over.

The Government must take responsibility, because they reversed the 1978 reforms which restricted the sales of some over-the-counter medicines as people were

[Mr. Flynn]

becoming addicted to them. Some of those drugs are back on the market, including Paramol 118, which contains morphine and paracetamol. It is fast becoming a major street drug, which is open to abuse as it is an alternative for heroin users. There is even a new help organisation with 2,000 members for what the organiser calls a hidden army of high street junkies, many of whom are hooked on drugs which, until recently, had been available only on prescription.

Drugs also play a part in road accidents. There are 100 million annual prescriptions—a vast figure—for drugs such as tranquillisers, anti-depressants and sleeping pills, which make the user more intoxicated, less able to drive a car and slower in reacting than if that person was above the alcohol limit. The European Road Safety Federation estimates that 10 per cent. of road deaths are caused by drivers affected by medicinal drugs—350 deaths a year in Britain.

Another legitimate cause for concern is the use of antibiotics on animals. Strict limits are laid down so that the antibiotics used for animals are different from those used for human beings. But there is one major problem involving one antibiotic. The danger is that it will get into the food chain and we will become resistant to it. That drug has been banned in Germany and Denmark, but not here. A powerful lobbying organisation in Europe is trying to prevent such a ban, despite the fact that it would be sensible.

Objective science is saying, with one loud, unanimous voice, that there is vast over-use of medicinal drugs. It pleads with the Government to take action, because the bacteria are winning. Patients' organisations and consumer associations all say that we are an over-medicated nation. Health physician Martin Fischer, from Charing Cross hospital, said that half the modern drugs could well be thrown out of the window were it not for the fact that the birds might eat them.

We are less compassionate to ourselves and our children than we are to the birds. Society has been conditioned to believe that every pain, discomfort, grief and moment of boredom suffered must have a remedy in a drug. That myth is the creation not of doctors but of those who are selling the drugs and making large profits from them.

Which? published a devastating report on people's widespread ignorance of the drugs they take. A survey of asthma sufferers showed that 61 per cent. were taking drugs—aspirin and ibuprofen—that can trigger symptoms of asthma. Half those surveyed suffering from high blood pressure were taking remedies that would increase their risk of heart problems. There is widespread ignorance among patients of the drugs that are prescribed.

Many actions can be taken. We need a major inquiry into the use of all drugs. We want restraint in prescribing and no attempt to liberalise the present system or to make drugs cheaper, as supermarkets such as Asda want. The sale of lethal addictive drugs should be confined to pharmacists, with limits on their sales. We should publicise the great dangers to road users who are intoxicated by drugs. We should improve hospital isolation facilities and hygiene standards, preferably with nurse-led wards, as suggested by the King's Fund.

There should be more of the so-called brown bag trials, where the elderly, who are the worst over-medicated group in society, are called in to explain to doctors what they are taking. Up to 15 per cent. of all elderly people are taking up to six different drugs each, the cocktail effect of which is the cause of many problems. Many trials are being carried out to re-examine such use and to give advice. We need an urgent inquiry into the medication of elderly people in residential homes, and we need a campaign of public education to persuade regular routine users of familiar medicines of the problems they cause.

The European body of specialists in research into headaches said that the main cause of headaches was paracetamol and aspirin. Timothy Steiner of Charing Cross hospital said:

"There are a lot of people who have daily headaches who take daily analgesics. If they stop the analgesics the headaches go away."

For many people, medicinal drugs are often essential life savers, but the greatest scientific wonder that any of us have ever encountered is the human body. It has miraculous restorative powers that are natural, and safer than many failing and dangerous chemical medicines, in which we have unwisely placed our trust.

10.14 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a few remarks in this debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on securing the parliamentary time. I should like to confine my remarks to MRSA—methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus—and underline the serious threat that that poses to anyone who goes to hospital for treatment.

I first heard of MRSA in 1993, when a friend telephoned me to say that there were a few cases of the antibiotic-resistant strain in my local Carmarthen hospital. I wrote to the hospital and met the chief executive and the public health laboratory consultant there. I was reassured that the number of cases was quite small.

At the hospital, in 1989, there were two MRSA cases; in 1990 there were two; in 1991 there were five; in 1992 there were 10; and in 1993, the year when I first heard of MRSA, there were 13. I spoke at the time to my brother who was a consultant in a London hospital. He said that MRSA was common in London hospitals, but that in Wales we did not have a particular problem.

I tabled some parliamentary questions at that time, and wrote to the Welsh Office. Generally, I received non-answers. The Welsh Office said that the information was not available, and not collated centrally. The reply that I received from the Under-Secretary of State for Wales was:

"The information . . . is not routinely collected"—

MRSA, in a sense, was too unimportant in 1993 for the figures to be collated centrally. I kept reading about MRSA incidents, however, in local and national newspapers. In July, I again tabled questions to the Welsh Office, and I was pleased that the information was now being made available and collated.

In my hospital, in 1994, there were 18 declared MRSA cases, in 1995, there were 36, and to July 1996, there have been 49 cases. That was a tenfold increase during that five-year period. Figures in parliamentary replies to my

hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West show that, for Wales, in 1995 the total was 442, and that this year to date it is 2,100. That is a fivefold growth in the past year.

I am glad that the information is now being collated centrally and made available. A parliamentary reply from the Department of Health to a further question on 3 December showed that, in England and Wales, there were 2,286 MRSA cases in 1992 and 17,063 in 1995. During those three years, there had been a sevenfold growth in the incidence of MRSA in hospitals in England and Wales. That is disturbing. What was a small problem in the late 1980s and early 1990s has become a major problem. I know two people—members of the Labour party, as it happens—in my constituency who last year contracted MRSA while in hospital.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West quoted the speech on 4 November by Lord Fitt, whose personal tragedy highlighted the problems that the bug is causing in hospitals.

The problem of antibiotic-resistant bugs is international and widespread. I only wish that the Government would take it more seriously. First, the Department of Health needs to liaise with the British Medical Association and the Medical Research Council to persuade general practitioners to prescribe antibiotics only when they are necessary.

Secondly, it is absurd for animal feeds to routinely contain antibiotics so that animals gain weight faster. It is done for economic, not health, reasons. Thirdly, there needs to be research into new antibiotics. We are in a race against new super-bugs that are adapting and modifying to become resistant to antibiotics. The Department of Health and the pharmaceutical companies must redouble their efforts to develop new antibiotics to address that increasing problem.

10.20 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the important debate initiated by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) and the points raised by the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams). They have raised a wide range of issues, and I am sure that they will understand that I cannot cover them all in great detail in the 10 minutes available to me.

First, I should like to reassure the hon. Gentlemen that Britain has one of the most effective control and licensing systems for drugs in any developed country, through the combination of the Medicines Control Agency and the Committee on Safety of Medicines. As the hon. Member for Newport West said, it is important that we do not have a closed mind on developments. The system for investigating the efficacy of drugs and the problems they may cause is a constant process of re-evaluation. Those who are charged by Government with the responsibility constantly to examine such matters on behalf of the public need to review their decisions in the light of any new evidence that emerges.

The hon. Member for Newport, West was quite right to point to the enormous benefits of modern medicine. The proper use of medicines relieves human suffering and cures or alters the course of many life-threatening diseases. However, modern medicine also involves a number of risks, and some concerns have been expressed about antibiotic-resistant organisms.

It is not a new phenomenon. One might think from the lurid headlines on the issue that we are hurtling towards a post-antibiotic era, and that the problem has only just been spotted. That is not the case. It was identified at an early stage in the use of antibiotics, and was countered by conventional infection control techniques and other intervention strategies, such as limiting or rotating their use. Those methods were successful, but they were also overshadowed by what at the time seemed to be a plentiful supply of new antibiotics. Between 1939 and 1972, for example, more than 30 new antibiotics were discovered. In more recent years, however, the number has fallen.

Microbial antibiotic resistance has always been an issue, but the need to address it has now become more focused. It has to be managed better. In considering new strategies and policies to combat its spread, we need to ensure that we make the best use of those antibiotics currently available, and perhaps be prepared to re-learn a number of lessons from the past.

The hon. Member for Newport, West referred to the particular problems that are found in other countries. It might be useful for the purpose of this Adjournment debate to look at the difference between this and those other countries.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Malone: I do not intend to give way. I have a limited period in which to answer a very complex debate.

In many countries, the spread of such types of micro-organisms has now been accepted as more or less inevitable. That is not so in the United Kingdom. One of our most effective weapons is the high quality of the infection control systems in our health service and hospitals. We also maintain—the hon. Member for Newport, West asked for reassurance on them—very strict controls over accessibility to antibiotics by ensuring that they are available only on prescription. That is very different from what happens in other countries—even other countries in Europe—where antibiotics are available over the counter, and very readily too. We are concerned about the matter.

MRSA was especially mentioned. It has attracted many headlines recently, and it is not helpful when phrases such as "killer bug" and "super-bug" are used. They have invoked anxiety among many patients and their families and friends, and conjured up images of a modern-day health care system that cannot cope with such problems.

It might be important to put on the record the fact that MRSA is an antibiotic-resistant form of a fairly common bacterium, staphylococcus aureus. It is one of the most common of all bacteria—it is present in about one third of the population—but a problem occurs when it gets out of control, which may have alarming effects. How do we deal with it in the NHS?

Specifically to tackle the problem, clinical guidelines on MRSA have been developed over recent years. Such guidance includes that jointly published, for example, in 1986 by the Hospital Infection Society and the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy. The guidance was updated, republished in 1990 and formally commended by the Department of Health to the NHS in 1994. We are working with professional groups on

[Mr. Malone]

how to take that further forward. We are of course concerned about such issues and alert to them, and will continue to update guidance as necessary.

The hon. Member for Newport, West raised an important point about treatment of elderly people, which I take extremely seriously. We issue advice on prescribing issues that include prescribing particularly for elderly patients, which is available to GPs from a range of sources. GPs are, of course, ultimately responsible for the prescriptions they write for their patients.

The Department publishes publications such as the British National Formulary, which is regularly updated and provides advice for all doctors. A number of bulletins also provide prescribing advice for all GPs. Copies of the British National Formulary are available in the Library if the hon. Member for Newport, West wants to have a look at it.

Concerns were expressed about the availability of medicines for children. Under guidelines issued by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society in relation to its code of ethics, a pharmacist should not supply medicine to children, regardless of whether they are receiving medicine for their own use or, as quite often happens, as a messenger for others, unless the pharmacist is satisfied that the product will be used correctly and delivered safely to an adult.

I listened carefully to what the hon. Members for Newport, West and for Carmarthen said about the issue, and I am pleased to be able to reassure them that we are actively considering the need for further restrictions on the sale of medicines to children. If there is evidence of a problem, we shall certainly react to it.

The hon. Member for Newport, West mentioned the problem of paracetamol as he sees it. He is a doughty campaigner on the issue. Paracetamol is a safe medication for the relief of pain, but it is recognised that, if it is abused contrary to the instructions for use, problems result from an unexpected reaction to the drug, causing liver failure, which is not immediately apparent after the drug is taken. That is why consultation is occurring on what should happen about pack sizes.

We take very seriously indeed the points that have been raised by the hon. Members for Newport, West and for Carmarthen. The hon. Member for Newport, West is quite right to say that the matters are on-going and will always require the Government's interest. I give him the reassurance that we shall continue to look at them. A number of other points were raised with which, in the short time left to me, I have not been able to deal, but I shall write to the hon. Gentleman about them. As always, he made a constructive contribution to an extremely important matter.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 12 December 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Dog Licences

1. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his policy with respect to the Province's dog licence scheme. [7315]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Michael Ancram): The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 provides for the licensing of dogs, the collection of strays and the control of dogs on land and on certain roads. It also provides controls on guard dogs and breeding establishments, and creates offences for allowing dogs to attack people or livestock.

Mr. Brown: Is the system accepted in Northern Ireland? If so, what justification is there for having one policy in Northern Ireland and a different policy in the rest of the United Kingdom? If my right hon. Friend agrees that the system is good and well respected, should he not make representations to the Home Secretary to ensure that the law of the land is the same throughout the kingdom?

Mr. Ancram: It appears that the system is accepted, because there is no great pressure for change. When we are asked why things happen in Northern Ireland, we often say that it is because it is different. On this occasion, I can say that with some authority, because the report of the UK interdepartmental working party on dogs, which was published in 1976, acknowledged that Northern Ireland had a distinct and more serious dog control problem than Great Britain, specifying in particular stray dogs and sheep worrying. For that reason, a different system applies.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: Will the Government give more latitude to magistrates in the implementation of the order, particularly in relation to destruction? Will the Government also consider the provision of a free licence for senior citizens?

Mr. Ancram: The last subject is a matter of some contention. This is not the first time it has been raised, but I am sure that my noble Friend Baroness Denton of Wakefield will have heard the hon. Gentleman.

On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I understand that the order gives no latitude. The destruction of dogs is required where a dog has attacked a person or another animal.

Tourism'

2. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the contribution of the tourism industry to Ulster's economy in the past two years; and if he will make a statement. [7316]

7. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the level of tourist activity in Northern Ireland for the year 1995–96. [7321]

Mr. Ancram: In 1995, peaceful conditions saw a dramatic increase in tourism: total visitors rose by 20 per cent. over 1994 to 1.5 million; holiday visitors by 67 per cent. to 276,000; and visitor revenue by 17 per cent. to £214 million. The year 1996 has reflected the ending of the IRA ceasefire and the summer disturbances. Downturns are forecast of 11 per cent. in the total number of visitors, 25 per cent. in holiday visitors and 6 per cent. in revenue.

Mr. Coombs: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that those are remarkable figures and that he will join me in congratulating the Northern Ireland tourist board on its excellent work during the ceasefires to draw the Province's manifest attractions to the attention of the outside world. Can there be any more dramatic evidence than that presented by those figures of the need for peace to be restored in Northern Ireland, so that prosperity continues to flourish?

Mr. Ancram: I very much endorse what my hon. Friend says. There is no doubt that an established peace will tremendously benefit the tourism industry in Northern Ireland, where there is enormous room for expansion. The industry accounts for 2 per cent. of gross domestic product in Northern Ireland. The figure is 5 per cent. in Scotland and in the Republic of Ireland; were the Northern Ireland figure to go up to those levels, 20,000 new jobs would be created there. It is interesting to note that, even in 1996, the visitor figures are still above the pre-ceasefire levels, and I pay tribute to the work of the Northern Ireland tourist board in attracting tourists to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Nigel Evans: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many small businesses depend on healthy tourism in Northern Ireland? Many are self-employed and some employ just a handful of people. Therefore, one of the immediate results of peace in Northern Ireland will be a boost to those small businesses.

Mr. Ancram: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; small businesses across the Province would benefit greatly from further increases in the number of tourists to the Province. I certainly hope that those who try to bring instability to the Province are aware of the damage that they are doing to prosperity in their own areas. I assure my hon. Friend that, even if there were peace, the interests of small

businesses and tourism would be severely damaged were the social chapter and the minimum wage to be introduced.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Does the Minister know of the tourist attractions in the Strangford lough area, and realise that tourists would like to visit such areas as Ballyhalbert, Grey Abbey, Ballywalter and Kircubbin? Does he think that it would be wise for the tourist board to provide grants for licensed inns and accommodation in the areas that tourists would like to visit, and not to deny grants to those areas because they are not in need of social benefits and not targeting social need?

Mr. Ancram: I do know the areas to which the right hon. Gentleman refers. I have visited them, and I understand what the right hon. Gentleman means when he mentions their attractiveness to tourists. I shall certainly always try to persuade those I know who are going to Northern Ireland to visit those areas. As he knows, I am not the Minister with responsibility for tourism, but I shall ensure that the matters that he has mentioned are passed on to my noble Friend.

Mr. Ashton: Is the Minister aware that the Select Committee on National Heritage has just completed a report into tourism and given great praise to Northern Ireland for its statutory system of classification and registration of accommodation, and that people who do not live up to that standard will lose their licence and go out of business? The Committee has recommended to the Government that a similar system should be introduced in England, but the Secretary of State has refused to do so. Why does a law that works very well in Northern Ireland not apply to some of the hotels in London, for example, that rip off foreigners, are ridden with bugs and rats and are a damn disgrace? Why does the Government not introduce a consistent policy?

Mr. Ancram: If ever I have responsibility for tourism and national heritage, I will be in a position to answer that question—today, however, I am answering questions on Northern Ireland. We do things well in Northern Ireland, and we do them well because we are different.

Mr. Worthington: Since 1991, the Government have said that one of their fundamental policies has been to target social need, and to focus on those areas and people most in need. Is the Minister aware of the report by the Northern Ireland Council of Voluntary Associations, which states that the Northern Ireland tourist board is the worst of all government bodies in targeting social need? The board makes no mention of targeting social needs in its key objectives, and meeting those needs is not one of its key targets. The board's most recent annual report contained not one reference to targeting social needs. Despite this week's cuts, is the Minister able to confirm that targeting social needs is still a Government priority, and what will he do about the Northern Ireland tourist board and all the other government bodies that have been shown to be missing the target?

Mr. Ancram: Overall, as the hon. Gentleman knows, targeting social need remains one of the three priorities of Government policy. If he thinks that one can order tourists to go in certain directions, I do not think that he understands fully what happens in the tourist trade. We can attract tourists to Northern Ireland, but we cannot force them to visit specific places. We are trying to ensure that tourists visit all around Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Did the Minister read the remarks of the Republic of Ireland's Minister for Tourism on the branding Ireland initiative? He said that he detected political benefits in such an initiative. Will the Minister assure the House—I understood that it was Government policy—that no all-Ireland tourist structure will be set up without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland? I should like to praise the Northern Ireland tourist board—with which I have worked very closely over the past year—for the high professionalism, drive and enthusiasm that it has demonstrated.

If the Provisional IRA would call a complete and permanent cessation of violence, it would allow tourism to make a real contribution to our economy.

Mr. Ancram: On the second point, I agree with the hon. Member and, indeed, I made the same point earlier. I hope that that message is heard loud and clear throughout Northern Ireland in all parts of the community from which violence can come.

I know that the hon. Gentleman has strong views on the initiative, but it is a great opportunity for the two parts of the island of Ireland to co-operate on tourism, to their mutual benefit. At a cost of some £500,000 over three to five years, it is likely to secure 720 jobs and to earn £27 million extra. That is good value for money in anyone's terms.

French Lorry Drivers' Strike

3. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the effect of the French lorry drivers' strike on owner drivers and road haulage contractors in Northern Ireland and on the Northern Ireland economy. [7317]

Mr. Ancram: The effect of the strike on owner drivers and road haulage contractors, and on the Northern Ireland economy, will become apparent only when the relevant details become available.

Mr. Beggs: A number of road haulage contractors, small businesses and owner drivers have been affected by the French and Danish blockades. Does the Minister share my concern about reports that the French police assisted the strikers and about the reports that British claims for compensation that arose from disruption in 1992 have still not been settled? Can he assure me that those Northern Ireland businesses that submit legitimate claims for compensation will have his support and representation for early settlement by the French Government?

Mr. Ancram: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern, as I am sure he shares with me the view that blocking roads anywhere damages commerce and trade.

On compensation, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has obtained firm assurances from the French Transport Minister that claims for damage to vehicles or loads and for loss of earnings will be considered as quickly as possible. My right hon. Friend is

also aware of the delays on previous occasions and he is resolving detailed arrangements for making claims for compensation with the French authorities. He will continue to monitor the situation carefully.

Mr. John Marshall: As the free movement of people and goods was the foundation of the European Community and the Single European Act, may I suggest to my right hon. Friend that our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister should raise the subject at the forthcoming summit in Dublin and suggest to the French and the Greeks that their blockades are not very communautaire?

Mr. Ancram: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I hope that those who claim to believe in the free movement of goods within the single market and the European Union will look carefully at the results of those industrial disputes.

Housing Benefit

4. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average level of housing benefit paid to recipient households in Northern Ireland; what are the principal categories of accommodation in respect of which the benefit is paid; and if he will make a statement. [7318]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Malcolm Moss): The average housing benefit paid applies only to private sector tenants and at 15 November 1996 was £45.01 a week. Public sector tenants receive housing benefit in the form of a rent rebate for which an average of £34.12 a week was paid.

The principal categories of accommodation are public sector accommodation, private sector accommodation and owner-occupied accommodation.

Mr. Greenway: Would it not be true to say that the housing situation in Northern Ireland is under control, and that—given the figures my hon. Friend has given to the House—there is not the level of homelessness in that part of the nation that has been suggested and that those who pretend there is should withdraw their remarks?

Mr. Moss: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. It is true that we do not have a homelessness problem in Northern Ireland. Housing benefit is paid to some 77 per cent. of all public sector tenants and is certainly targeting social need.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: Will the Minister tell the House what strategy has been set up for co-operation between the Housing Executive and the Social Security Agency to deal with any fraud in the system that has not yet been considered? What is the up-to-date situation?

Mr. Moss: Research into the level of fraud and inaccuracy in housing benefit in Northern Ireland began on 1 October 1996 and we hope to have a report by the end of March 1997. At the moment, there are effective liaison arrangements between the Social Security Agency and the Housing Executive, but I accept the premise behind the hon. Gentleman's question that perhaps more could be done. The Social Security (Fraud) Bill, which is in Committee, will include provisions to ensure that claimants cannot exploit, for example, the postal redirection system to claim benefit fraudulently from different addresses. That issue was raised recently by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Illsley: Is the Minister aware that the rent increase announced by the Department this week is above the national average and will mean that housing benefit payments will increase? Is he also aware that, in 1995-96, 10,768 families presented themselves as homeless, suggesting a probable true figure of 22,000 people? In July and August alone, 600 families were made homeless as a result of Drumcree.

Is the Minister aware that the Budget cuts announced this week of £23 million—which will impact on grants and improvements and could threaten the whole new build programme for the following year—will have another devastating effect? Homelessness is increasing by 7 per cent. a year. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Budget cuts will be compounded by the cuts to the action for community employment schemes, which will result in hostels for the homeless being closed? Rather than imposing a £23 million cut in the housing budget, does the Minister not consider that it would be better to allow the Housing Executive to put up private finance?

Mr. Moss: The average weekly rent increase proposed for Northern Ireland in the next year will be 4 per cent., which is 2 per cent. above inflation. That will result in an increase of £1.32 a week, which is £7 a week lower than in England and Wales. As for the overall Housing Executive budget, we expect that there will be a reduction in the new build, but only of 100 housing new starts next year.

Punishment Beatings

5. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on punishment beatings and killings in Northern Ireland since the end of the IRA ceasefire. [7319]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Sir John Wheeler): Between 1 February and 8 December 1996, the RUC has recorded 274 so-called punishment beatings. Of these, 149 are attributed to republican and 125 to loyalist terrorist gangs. These attacks are intended to intimidate parts of the Northern Ireland population and are without any justification. There have also been 14 murders this year arising from the security situation.

In a majority of cases, victims of this kind of attack are reluctant to co-operate with police inquiries, and the groups who perpetrate these atrocities do not claim responsibility, making it difficult for the RUC categorically to apportion responsibility and carry out investigations. However, at least 20 people have been charged.

Mr. Barnes: Is the Minister aware that, yesterday evening, there were three other sets of punishment beatings in Northern Ireland? One took place in Newry, where four young men were beaten and given 24 hours to leave the country. Another was in Derry, and an executive member of Families Against Intimidation and Terror in Northern Ireland was also attacked. Two of the attacks

seemed to have been carried out by the IRA and the other—against the Families Against Intimidation and Terror member—by Protestant paramilitary groups. Are not so-called punishment beatings running at an unprecedented level, as are recruitment to the IRA and its production of mortar weapons?

Sir John Wheeler: The hon. Gentleman's analysis is correct. The level of these attacks has been rising in recent months and throughout this year, and every 24 hours brings one of those attacks from terrorist gangs from either side. The Provisional IRA uses these savage and vicious attacks as a strategy of social and political control. The attacks are evil, without any justification and cost the people of Northern Ireland a great deal of money, as well as grief.

Rev. William McCrea: In the light of the increase in the number and the brutal nature of so-called punishment attacks, will the Minister tell the House how many persons have been brought to court and how many have been found guilty of such activities? Does the Minister believe that all paramilitary organisations have been involved in such attacks, and would that not be a breach of the Mitchell principles?

Sir John Wheeler: I cannot give precise information on the number of successful prosecutions. Unhappily, they are few and far between, for the reasons I have already given. People are intimidated and are frightened to give information to the RUC to enable it to carry out the investigation. The hon. Gentleman is right. Attacks are made by so-called loyalists as well as by republican terrorist gangs and are without any justification.

As to the Mitchell report recommendations, representatives of the smaller parties in the talks forum are committed to the Mitchell principles and have so declared themselves.

Dr. Hendron: The Secretary of State is aware that the McLaughlin family in west Belfast were nearly wiped out recently by joyriders and that Mr. McLaughlin's mother-in-law had her leg smashed. I am sure that he is also aware that we have a massive law and order problem, not only in west Belfast but far beyond it, and that we have a problem in nationalist areas with police acceptability, especially in the post-Drumcree situation?

Having said that, does the Secretary of State agree that there are no circumstances in which it can be justifiable for a young man aged 16 to be tied upside down and have his legs smashed, as happened in my constituency recently? Does he also agree that the message must go out to the Provisional IRA that, when it calls its ceasefire, as I believe it probably will just before the forthcoming general election, it must include a total and absolute cessation not only of murder but—I will not use the words "punishment beatings", as that gives the wrong implications—of brutalities?

Sir John Wheeler: I am aware of the case to which the hon. Gentleman refers. It is an example of the extreme horror that we endure every day in Northern Ireland. I say this to Mr. Adams and his cronies in the Provisional IRA-Sinn Fein: if they intend to bring about a ceasefire, these evil attacks on ordinary people in Northern Ireland must end if it is to have a scintilla of credibility. The attacks are without any justification. The RUC polices the whole of Northern Ireland. There is no street and no part of the Province to which it does not have access, and it will continue to police Northern Ireland and seek to bring these perpetrators to justice.

So far this year, the 300 or so punishment attacks have cost the people of Northern Ireland nearly £3 million from their expenditure—money that would otherwise have been spent on the health service and education. That is the extent of the evil for which every person in Northern Ireland has to pay.

Mr. Robert McCartney: Does the Minister agree that, in view of the increase in this barbarous behaviour and its political effect, it was strange that punishment beatings were not mentioned in the Prime Minister's policy statement of two weeks ago on Northern Ireland and the terms on which Sinn Fein might come in? Is it not both illogical and ironic that some of the parties represented in the talks on the so-called loyalist side, or the organisations that they are fronting, have been responsible this year for some 125 punishment beatings? Can those parties be allowed to continue in the talks, if the beatings are attributable to organisations that they are said to front and represent?

Sir John Wheeler: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it clear in his statement that all terrorist activity had to cease. That is made clear in the Mitchell commission report. Whatever the activity—whether it is targeting, preparing to fire mortars, the use of guns, or the savage and brutal attacks on individuals—it would have to end. They should not occur now. The so-called loyalist politicians in the talks process have signed up to Mitchell and it is a matter to be dealt with in that process. The hon. and learned Gentleman can pursue it there.

Ceasefire

6. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received from Sinn Fein relating to an IRA ceasefire. [7320]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Sir Patrick Mayhew): None.

Mr. Wilkinson: I am grateful for that brief reply.

Will my right hon. and learned Friend make it absolutely clear to his Irish Government counterpart that there will be no question of an early admission of Sinn Fein to the political talks on the future of Northern Ireland, but that Sinn Fein must demonstrate over a considerable period, by forswearing violence as an instrument to secure its political objectives and stopping political beatings and intimidation, that it is a genuinely democratic party? Will he further make it clear that, if Sinn Fein is incapable of doing that, the talks will move on swiftly without it?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The talks will in any event proceed, I earnestly hope, with the nine out of 10 parties elected to the process that are already conducting them. It is the wish of the Government, and indeed of the Irish Government, that it should be 10 out of 10, but not on any terms. If Sinn Fein wants to join the talks, it must

come in on the same terms as anyone else: there must be an unequivocal ceasefire and it must show, in the terms of the ground rules for the talks, that it is exclusively committed to peaceful methods and abides by democratic methods. The Prime Minister dealt with that very clearly in his recent statement and at the meeting with Mr. Bruton, the Irish Taoiseach.

Mr. Trimble: Can the Secretary of State confirm that the security forces in Northern Ireland have succeeded in the past day or two in foiling yet another major terrorist atrocity and that, in the past few weeks, there have been several occasions on which the IRA has attempted to mount major terrorist attacks? Does he agree that those actions are a more reliable guide to the intentions of Sinn Fein-IRA than the rumours of a ceasefire that some people in the House and, more significantly, in Dublin have allowed to delude them? Does he further agree that it is a shame that so much time has been wasted in recent months in pursuit of that will-o'-the-wisp, with the result that the opportunity that existed three months ago has now been squandered?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I regretfully endorse what the hon. Gentleman says. There have been a number of attacks or attempted attacks recently. Only last night at Duncairn gardens in Belfast, a call was made to the Samaritans using an IRA code word quite patently intended to set up an ambush for security forces. A wheelie bin with nearly 1 kg of Semtex in it was then discovered, which could have done immense damage.

Previously, vehicles were found laden with explosives at Drumadd, and other attempts were forestalled. I pay tribute to the efforts of the security forces in that regard. It is of great interest to the people of Northern Ireland to conjecture how that sort of behaviour is compatible with the language of peace and democracy that the IRA and those who speak for it espouse.

Sir John Cope: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, whatever Sinn Fein-IRA may say or do about a ceasefire, anyone in this country, in the Republic, or elsewhere, who is inclined to think that it might have changed its nature, would do well to study the words of Mr. Sean O'Callaghan, an extremely brave man whom some of us had the opportunity to meet here yesterday?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I believe that those words, coming from that source, have had great influence. It is abundantly clear that there is a great gap between the conduct of the IRA as exemplified in what we were discussing a few minutes ago and what is necessary to enable Sinn Fein to enter the talks. It has to show that it is firmly committed to peace and to the democratic process. That is the policy of the Irish Government as well as the British Government, and it must be the policy of all people of sense.

Mr. McGrady: Given the earlier responses, does the Secretary of State still agree that the most urgent need in Northern Ireland is for a permanent peace? Is he aware of the grave misgivings and deep disappointment felt by the people in Northern Ireland who are genuinely striving for peace about the action of the Prime Minister in the House two weeks ago, when he apparently unilaterally broke off, as it were, the negotiations that were in train through my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume)? Will he ask the Prime Minister urgently to re-establish the dialogue so that we in Northern Ireland, who are suffering the violence, can hope for an early, permanent and provable peace?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Of course everyone wants peace in Northern Ireland, but peace has to be peace on democratic terms and in fulfilment of democratic principles. The people of Northern Ireland, and the people of the country as a whole, are not prepared to meet the blackmailing demands of terrorists to secure an absence of violence.

On the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, there have been no negotiations involving the British Government. I do not really understand his language about the Prime Minister acting unilaterally. My right hon. Friend expressed the policy of the Government of which he is the head; he was entitled to do that and he did it very valuably.

Mr. Robathan: I am much encouraged by what my right hon. and learned Friend has said. Will he examine the motivation of the IRA and Sinn Fein in their alleged desire for peace? Many hon. Members believe that their desire for peace is a sham and a means of gaining electoral advantage and support at the expense of the party of the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady). Mr. Adams and his cohorts regard the peace process solely as a way to extend their war by other means.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Only the IRA knows its true intention; only Sinn Fein and its leaders know their intention. The rest of us have to act on outward and visible signs of their intention. The outward and visible signs that I and other hon. Members have mentioned are incompatible with a desire for peace. That is why both the British and Irish Governments are insisting that, after the first requirement of an unequivocal declaration of a ceasefire in unequivocal words, there has to be time in which we can judge actions against words.

Ms Mowlam: We join the Secretary of State in condemning those responsible for placing the mortar discovered this morning at the Girdwood barracks, and for other recent finds, and congratulate the RUC on its work. Do not such finds reinforce the need for weapons held by paramilitary organisations to be decommissioned? Will the Secretary of State therefore join in welcoming once again the involvement of George Mitchell in assessing the views of the parties and the two Governments on decommissioning and in urging all parties to work constructively with Senator Mitchell so that talks can move swiftly forward and we can at long last make a start on full political negotiations.

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am grateful for the hon. Lady's comments at the outset. I gladly endorse what she said about Senator Mitchell and his contribution, which is very distinguished and extremely helpful. Of course we want all illegally held arms to be got rid of. I would like to express my pleasure at the fact that the Irish Government have introduced their own Decommissioning Bill and have given every indication that it will be enacted very quickly. If I may again cite Mr. Bruton's language, in a democracy, violence and politics do not match. But it is

the true intention of people who claim a place at the table that has to be discerned. They have to show what that is by their actions as well as their words.

Mr. Wilshire: With punishment beatings, targeting, re-arming and recruiting continuing, and with a former member of the IRA saying that helping Sinn Fein-IRA masquerade as a democratic party can only lead to civil war, is not it time to stop falling over backwards to try to get Sinn Fein-IRA into all-party talks and to crack down on evil murderers in the proper way?

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I am not falling over backwards or forwards, nor am I helping Sinn Fein to masquerade in any way. I seek to enable a process for which people have voted to come fully into effect. It is therefore important that the Government should make it plain that if Sinn Fein complies with the requirements imposed by both Governments on all other democratic parties, it will not be excluded from those talks. The question is: when will Sinn Fein be prepared so to demonstrate its commitment to those principles? It is important that it should do so; if it does not, the blame will lie with it and no one else.

Budget (Health Boards)

8. **Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the effects of the Budget on the services provided by the health boards. [7323]

Mr. Moss: In 1997-98, £1.642 billion will be available for health and social services—a 1.5 per cent. real-terms increase.

Mr. Ainsworth: The Minister will surely know that the deep cuts that have been made this year are having a considerable effect, with the consequent postponement of 6,000 operations and 55,000 outpatient appointments. Surely he should accept that, contrary to what he has just said, the Budget provides no real increases for next year. The consequence of those cuts will therefore be carried forward and exacerbated, and the inevitable effect will be longer waiting lists next year.

Mr. Moss: I reiterate that this year's increase is a 1.5 per cent. real-terms increase—double the rate of last year's increase. We shall also be finding in-year money this year to help with elective surgery cases. We hope that next year—once I have discussed the matter with the boards and trusts—there will be no further cuts in the health and social services of Northern Ireland.

Rev. Martin Smyth: We welcome that promise and look forward to seeing it fulfilled. Does the Minister share my concern that beds are being blocked because hospitals are keeping patients who could be released into residential and nursing homes—at far less cost to the Treasury—in order to hold that money in their own units? Does he also share my concern that the Ulster hospital says that it will be unable to pay salaries from January, that the Royal Victoria hospital has stopped elective surgery for neurosurgical cases, and that there are tremendous cries for aid in other parts of the Province?

Mr. Moss: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point about bed blocking, and I shall make an announcement about statutory provision in residential homes very soon. I repeat that in-year money from the Eastern board will be made available to assist with elective surgery cases, particularly at the Royal Victoria and Ulster hospitals.

Mr. Dowd: Will the Minister confirm that his use of the phrase "real-terms increase" does not relate to NHS inflation—it refers to the standard rate of inflation? Will he also confirm that the settlement that has been announced will do nothing to prevent further cuts in the acute sector in Northern Ireland next year? Many hospitals in Northern Ireland have been closed for elective surgery for all but the patients of fundholding general practitioners. Will he further confirm to the House, as he did to me in writing, that Northern Ireland will not receive anything from the alleged year-on-year increases in NHS spending that the Secretary of State for Health and the Prime Minister, misleadingly, make so much of?

Mr. Moss: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, funding for the health service in Northern Ireland is arranged separately from that for the health service in England and Wales. I repeat: this year we have a real-terms increase of 1.5 per cent. The increase in the family health service alone is 8 per cent., and that includes increases in the general practitioner service and allows for a considerable increase in the drugs budget. We are bearing down on that budget and I hope to release savings in the next year that can be ploughed back into other health services.

Security Situation

9. **Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the security situation in Northern Ireland. [7324]

Sir John Wheeler: The loyalist ceasefire remains in place, which I very much welcome. The level of threat from the Provisional IRA remains high. The vigilance of the security forces on both sides of the border has foiled a number of recent terrorist attacks. In the past month, more than 50 people have been charged with terrorist-related offences, including murder and attempted murder, and a significant amount of weaponry has been recovered.

Sir Irvine Patnick: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. What is the cost of all that? What is the cost of it in Northern Ireland? What is the knock-on cost for the mainland?

Sir John Wheeler: The costs to the United Kingdom taxpayer are huge. In Northern Ireland, the average cost of a punishment attack is about £9,000—money that would go to the health service in Northern Ireland were it not being used to deal with the consequences of such a crime. About £3 million has been spent so far this year as a consequence of punishment attacks. Nearly £800,000 has been paid out on claims for arson against the destruction of churches in Northern Ireland. The costs are huge and are continuing to rise.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 December. [7345]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, in the run-up to the Dublin summit, he will not abandon the British veto? Will he assure the House that he will never abandon that veto and never dissemble it in favour of qualified majority voting? Is he aware that European socialist leaders are in Dublin planning to do just that, and that the leader of the Labour party is part of that plot?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly confirm that we intend to retain the veto at the intergovernmental conference. I believe that to lose the veto would be quite unacceptable from the point of view of British national interest. It would open up policies that would be utterly unacceptable not only to the House but, I believe, to the majority of people in this country. We will maintain the veto. As I have indicated to the House before, I see no significant case whatever for an extension of qualified majority voting.

Mr. Prescott: Will the Prime Minister confirm that yesterday's Treasury figures showed that the tax burden has gone up since 1992? Given his own record on tax, will he guarantee that, at the next general election, any tax promises that he makes will be made under oath?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman knows the relative records of the Conservative party and of his party on tax: he knows that income tax was 33p in the pound; he knows that other taxes went up to 98p in the pound; he knows that he has made £30 billion-worth of promises that he has to tax for; and he knows that he will be prepared to introduce a range of new taxes. It is no good him making silly gestures. That is the reality of life, and this country knows that.

Mr. Prescott: Cannot the right hon. Gentleman see that, regardless of whether the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) or the Prime Minister himself says that they will cut tax year on year, nobody believes the Tories? Will he now take down the posters that falsely claim that he cut tax, or is he going to carry on dissembling?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman might bear in mind the utterly untruthful and unscrupulous campaign that his party has been waging. Now that his leader has turned his back on him for a minute, perhaps he will confirm what the rate of the new windfall tax will be; perhaps he will tell us what the tartan tax will be and what its implications will be for Scotland; perhaps he will tell us about the health tax or the teenage tax or the extra tax on London or the very high taxes set by almost every Labour council up and down the country. Taxes, the right hon. Gentleman and the Labour party go together like strawberries and cream.

Mr. Prescott: Is the Prime Minister not aware that since 1992 no fewer than 16 Ministers have resigned from his Government, many in shameful circumstances, which is a record number for any Government in British history? No wonder the Tories have lost the trust of the nation. Are we not at last seeing the last throes of a dying, dissembling Government, who should realise that it is time to go?

The Prime Minister: I dare say the right hon. Gentleman has been practising that line in front of the mirror all morning. No doubt the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) is very pleased with his pupil for having learnt today's sound bite, but the right hon. Gentleman would be better off finding out policy and answering for the policies that his party tries to hide.

Q2. **Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 December. [7346]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Sir Irvine Patnick: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Has he seen the report that nearly one in three German companies are trying to escape from European employment legislation? Will he continue to ensure that British firms are never saddled with those job-wrecking policies?

The Prime Minister: It was the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) who went along with his Socialist International friends and signed up to precisely those policies, as no doubt his leader is doing yet again today, irrespective of the jobs that it will cost people in this country. I am not surprised that companies across Europe are moving from European countries to this country to establish themselves and to create jobs here. Other countries are losing investment as a result of following policies that the Opposition advocate. Companies are leaving those countries, coming here and investing and creating jobs, which is why our unemployment is falling.

Mr. Ashdown: Yesterday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that, if the practical advantages of a single currency outweighed the disadvantages, he would be in favour of joining. Will the Prime Minister confirm that that is his view as well?

The Prime Minister: That is precisely why we have kept an option—so that we can decide what is in the national interest. That has been our position from the outset. We must determine whether something is in the British national interest. If it is in the British national interest, we do it; if it is not in the British national interest, we say no.

Mr. Viggers: While courage and valour are normally associated with our armed forces, does my right hon. Friend agree that there have been some remarkable cases of courage beyond the call of normal duty in our schools and elsewhere in the face of violence recently? Does he think that the *Daily Mail* and others have a reasonable point that such courage might reasonably be rewarded in the honours list or elsewhere?

The Prime Minister: I think, as my hon. Friend knows, that there is a proper mechanism for considering such matters and that it is not for me to comment on them from the Dispatch Box. I am sure that what my hon. Friend said will be heard in appropriate places.

Q4. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 December. [7348]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hutton: Why cannot the Prime Minister admit that taxes on income as a percentage of earnings for all families will be higher at the time of the next general election than they were at the last? Why cannot he admit the accuracy of his own Government's figures—or has dissembling become a way for life for the Tory Government?

The Prime Minister: I will tell the hon. Gentleman the real fact about taxes: that taxes would have been higher this year if we had still had the same tax regime as we had in 1991; taxes have fallen. I will also tell him that the average family will be £1,100 a year better off as a result of the tax changes and growth in the economy. That would not have occurred under any other Government, and certainly did not occur under the last Labour Government.

Mr. Carttiss: In his discussions at the Dublin conference this weekend, will my right hon. Friend press as hard as he can on our European Union partners the need to come up with a favourable solution to the problem of quota hopping, which has caused so much damage to the United Kingdom fishing industry?

The Prime Minister: Yes, but that will be a matter for the intergovernmental conference rather than discussions over this weekend. As my hon. Friend will know, we tabled a protocol to deal with quota hopping, and it is one of the matters that we shall deal with during discussions at the intergovernmental conference.

Q5. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 December. [7349]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: May I have a very straight answer to my very simple question, which the Prime Minister has already been asked by two Labour Members? Is it true that yesterday the Government published some new figures on taxation, which show that far more of an average family's income will be paid to the Government in the coming year in the form of national insurance and income tax than was paid in 1992? The answer is yes or no. May I have that answer please?

The Prime Minister: I have answered that question twice in the past few minutes, and the answer is exactly the same as it was a few moments ago.

Mr. David Hunt: Will my right hon. Friend join me in recognising the outstanding reputation of the United Kingdom civil service throughout the world for integrity, independence and impartiality? Will he further join me in condemning those civil servants who appear to have joined some elements of the press and the Labour party in a network of systematic leaks, which are damaging not only the Government and Parliament but the reputation of the civil service and the Labour party?

The Prime Minister: I certainly share my right hon. Friend's belief that we have a first-class civil service. The overwhelming majority of civil servants abide strictly by the rules, but unfortunately a very few do not. Any leaks are to be deplored, but equally to be deplored are the activities of Labour Front Benchers and Back Benchers who encourage and use leaks.

"Leaked documents are particularly welcome. I promise to make good use of them."

Those words were used by the then shadow Transport Secretary not very long ago. I hope that we shall hear no lectures about standards in polities from people who make such remarks.

Q7. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 December. [7351]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: When my right hon. Friend goes to Dublin at the weekend, will he press on his European counterparts the success of the British economy and tell them that it can be attributed to 17 continuous years of Conservative government?

The Prime Minister: I shall most certainly do that. Anybody who reads what is being said almost daily in Europe—for example in the French press recently—will realise that people abroad recognise the success of the British economy and, on a number of occasions, have praised not just the success of the British economy but the policies of this Government, which they believe have brought it about.

Q8. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 December. [7352]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mullin: With the benefit of hindsight, does the Prime Minister consider it unfortunate that a company controlled by one man now controls 40 per cent. of our national newspapers and the technology liable to form the gateway to all British television in the near future? Does he consider it unhealthy that we now appear to have reached a position where neither of the main parties is willing to speak out because of the fear that that company will unleash its newspapers against it in the run up to a general election? This is not a cheap attempt to score points and I hope that the Prime Minister will not respond in that way. It is a serious matter in a democracy.

The Prime Minister: We have an open market. I believe that that is the right way for us to proceed, but that power must be used responsibly. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about that. I hope he will draw that to the attention of his party leader, who flew to prostrate himself at the feet of the gentleman whom I believe the hon. Gentleman has in mind.

Mr. Renton: Has my right hon. Friend had time today to read the excellent article, which is extremely positive about our trade with Europe, on page 6 of *The Sun*, written by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer? Its headline reads: "Britain can be Champs of Europe like Man United!" Our local club in Sussex, the Seagulls—Brighton and Hove Albion—although conveniently placed for trade with the continent, is in every kind of trouble at the moment. It would be helpful if my right hon. Friend could instruct his colleagues, when they write such positive articles in future, to give the Seagulls a bit of a boost.

The Prime Minister: I am certainly happy to commend the scale of our trade with our colleagues in the European Union. There is no doubt about its importance, its growth and the extent to which it has contributed to a general rise in the standard of living in the United Kingdom. As for my hon. Friend's football team, if he will forgive me, I often have enough difficulty with my own football team.

Madam Speaker: I deprecate the absence of hon. Members today without an apology to the Prime Minister or to me.

Public Expenditure (Wales)

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. William Hague): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on public expenditure in Wales. Copies of my statement, provisional standard spending assessments, my proposals for a council tax damping scheme, provisional capping principles and notional amounts for local authorities are available in the Vote Office. Full details of my decisions will be published in due course. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members are having difficulty hearing. Will those who are leaving please do so quietly now? We have business to conduct here.

Mr. Hague: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Next year, the Welsh Office will have its biggest budget ever, at £6.9 billion. That is £100 million more than the budget for this year and £70 million more than the original plans. Provision for Wales is reached through the block and formula arrangements. For this survey, the consequentials from local government revenue provision in England have been calculated on the basis of total standard spending rather than aggregate external finance. That is essentially a technical change, but it brings significant benefits to the Welsh block.

I intend to make the money available go even further next year by making the most of the private finance initiative. Six deals have already been signed, with a total capital value of £25 million, and more are in the pipeline. In all, we hope to generate capital spending of around £350 million through the PFI over the next three years.

I am making available £0.5 million to assist local authorities in developing a range of pathfinder PFI projects, and I have asked the Higher and Further Education Funding Councils to look at the scope for providing similar assistance in their sphere.

The Welsh Office will operate efficiently and at minimum cost. Over the next three years, the costs of running the Welsh Office will fall by more than 8 per cent. I am requiring all non-departmental public bodies in Wales to make efficiency savings in their running costs too, releasing overall savings next year of about £1.5 million.

The decisions that I am presenting today are clear choices that build on success. My aim is to increase personal prosperity and to improve quality of life. I am therefore making health, jobs and education my priorities, even though that means reductions in some other programmes.

In my statement last year, I increased health spending in Wales for the current year by £84 million. Today I am announcing an additional £94 million for next year, an increase over this year's plans of more than 4 per cent. Health spending in Wales is 14 per cent. more per head than in England. This is a very good settlement for health authorities and trusts, but I look to them to continue to make efficiency savings and to drive down costs—particularly management costs—so that the savings can be transferred to patient care.

Health service capital expenditure of £40 million is going through the PFI process at the moment. I can also announce today a package of conventionally funded schemes worth more than £55 million, including £31 million for the provision of a new accident and emergency service and other developments at the University hospital of Wales; £20 million, subject to health authority support for the business case, for a cancer centre in north Wales; and £4 million for a medium secure unit also in north Wales.

The total amount available for training next year will be £136 million, about the same as the expected spend this year. Our aim is to equip Wales with the skills needed for the record-breaking number of jobs now being created. I am increasing provision for modern apprenticeships to £27 million, an increase over spending this year of nearly £12 million—more than 75 per cent.—allowing a further 4,300 young people to begin modern apprenticeships.

Some £2.8 million will be available for adult technicians, which is more than twice as much as provided this year. Support for careers service companies will increase by 18 per cent. on this year's spending. To accommodate those increases, we will have to cut back elsewhere. Against a background of falling unemployment, there will be a reduction in the training for work programme.

In addition to the provision I am making available through standard spending assessments for local authorities, I am providing directly £566 million for education in Wales. This includes £177 million for further education and £237 million for higher education through the funding councils. Total capital provision for schools will be £68 million, including £9 million for the popular schools initiative; £5.5 million for schools projects under capital challenge; and £1 million for the technology schools initiative. Together with the increase of more than 20 per cent. in the past two years, that brings the level of capital provision to its highest ever for schools in Wales.

In giving extra money to some areas, I must give less to others. The central Government roads programme will be reduced next year to £113 million. The first priority is the maintenance of the existing network, but work will also continue on three schemes starting this financial year—the A40 Carmarthen eastern bypass, the A4060 Mountain Hare to Dowlais, and the A55 Waen to Pont Dafydd. Work will start next year on the A470 between Dolwyddelan and Pont Afanc. Work will continue on the proposed PFI schemes—notably the A55 dualling across Anglesey—and on a programme of important structural renewal, including the reconstruction of the A449 between Usk and Newport.

I am also reducing net capital provision for Housing for Wales next year to £60 million. That will support a gross investment programme by housing associations of well over £100 million and will provide around 3,000 new dwellings next year. It will be provided on top of gross investment of more than £1.4 billion since Housing for Wales was set up in 1989. The social housing grant will be set at 56 per cent, which represents a generous level of support and maintains downward pressure on rent levels.

I am providing £215 million for local authority housing. That includes £164 million for private sector housing renovation, incorporating £14 million of challenge funding for area renewal. It will bring total investment in private housing renovation to more than £1.1 billion since 1990. To encourage the transfer of housing stock to local housing companies or housing associations, I am introducing a three-year holiday from the 20 per cent. levy

on capital receipts and a guarantee that local authorities can use 25 per cent. of receipts to spend on housing. In all, I propose to make £443 million available to local authorities for capital expenditure next year, including the provision for schools and housing that I have already detailed.

While next year's local authority capital settlement is a reduction on this year's level, I have been careful to protect schools—a priority—and local authority capital provision next year will still be very considerable. In fact, per head of population, it will be two and a half times that for England.

I am providing more than £76 million next year for local authority roads. That includes provision of nearly £54 million for transport grant schemes to meet the estimated costs of committed schemes.

I am also providing initial funding for the design costs associated with five new schemes, although future funding depends on new arrangements being agreed by local authorities to avoid their cost overruns, which have caused serious problems in recent years. These schemes concern the Tredegar Park interchange, the Port Talbot peripheral distributor road, the Church Village bypass, the Wrexham industrial estate, and the Ceredigion link roads.

The £39 million available for capital and revenue under the strategic development scheme will fund all forward commitments in the next year and an allocation of £11.6 million, which authorities can decide for themselves how to use.

I am announcing today projects with a total value of £32.6 million to be supported under the new Welsh capital challenge. Allocations for next year will total £20 million. As well as the schools projects that I have already mentioned, this innovative approach will support a wide range of projects to help create or safeguard 1,200 jobs and, in partnership with the private sector, provide further employment opportunities. These include industrial parks in Anglesey and Carmarthen and tourist developments in Llandudno and Porthcawl.

The reductions of which I have spoken will allow us to increase spending in other areas on top of the huge rise in health spending that I have already announced.

For local authority revenue spending, I propose to set aggregate external finance, AEF, at £2,578 million—up £64 million or 2.6 per cent. That is £884 for every person in Wales, over £150 more than in England. I propose to set total standard spending for next year at £2,931 million, which is 2.3 per cent. up on this year, and includes £169 million for community care and £341 million for police authorities. The police settlement is up 2.7 per cent., and builds on increases in the past two years of five per cent. and 11 per cent. respectively.

With that level of support, there is no reason for the average increase in Welsh council tax to be any higher than that in England; and the large difference between English and Welsh council tax levels will continue to be at least as great as last year. These decisions, though, are for local and police authorities to take bearing in mind the impact on council tax payers. They should certainly not view capping limits—which I will come to in a moment—as a target. They are a ceiling.

I propose to continue damping, and within AEF I am making £18.3 million available so that the maximum increase in council tax in Wales should be no more than 15 per cent., excluding community council precepts and the cost of discretionary non-domestic rate relief. The majority of increases will be capped well below that level.

For next year, I propose that a local authority's budget should be considered excessive if it exceeds its standard spending assessment by 12.5 per cent. or involves an increase over its base budget for this year of more than 1.8 per cent., or more than the cash increase in its SSA, whichever is greater. I shall consult local government in Wales on the basis for my capping and damping proposals.

These principles are provisional. Actual principles will not be set until local and police authorities have set their budgets for next year. My Department is writing to Welsh local authorities notifying them of their provisional SSAs.

Budgets for the national library and the national museums and galleries of Wales will be held constant next year, as will those of the Sports Council, the Wales tourist board and CADW.

The budget for the Arts Council for Wales will rise to £14.5 million, which will enable it to maintain its current level of support for the arts in Wales and reorganise its senior management structure. It will also provide £0.5 million over the next three years to support dance and drama students.

The Welsh Language Board will receive a significant increase, bringing its budget next year to £3.7 million, enabling it to discharge its new responsibilities of grant-aiding the four major Welsh language organisations.

I am providing £23.2 million for the Countryside Council for Wales, an increase of £1.2 million over this year. That comes on top of last year's large increase and the additional funds that I have made available in-year to address the consequences of the Sea Empress spillage.

Agriculture forms part of the Welsh Office budget, although it is not part of the block. Domestic expenditure on agriculture in Wales will be £66 million, an increase of £8 million over this year's spending. Taken with £192 million from the European Union, total provision next year will be £258 million. While that is less than the present year, it is mainly due to the revaluation of the green pound. We are increasing the hill livestock compensatory allowance rates for cattle by 105 per cent. and 194 per cent., and are maintaining the rates for sheep. Otherwise, provision for bovine spongiform encephalopathy is additional to the resources that I am announcing today for Wales, since it is dealt with on a UK basis, but Welsh farmers are benefiting from £3.3 billion of Government support to maintain the industry as a whole.

My top priority is the creation of a vibrant economy in Wales, in which the economic development agencies in Wales will continue to play a major part. Cardiff Bay development corporation will spend £53 million next year on the barrage, reclamation and development, thus attracting more private investment.

The gross budget of the Development Board for Rural Wales next year will be more than £20 million, which matches this year's spending. I have asked it to focus inward investment support on the western part of its area.

During this year, I have added £25 million to the Welsh Development Agency budget. I am adding a further £20 million for next year, which takes its grant in aid to £85 million, and the gross provision to £150 million.

[Mr. Hague]

The settlement will allow the agency to accommodate additional expenditure arising from the Lucky Goldstar project, and to continue its wide range of other programmes. Our success with LG has been spectacular, but I do not want resources to be concentrated in south-east Wales at the expense of other areas. I therefore want the agency, with the Land Authority for Wales, to prepare key strategic investment sites across Wales.

This year has been a tremendous year for inward investment. More than 130 projects have been secured. Those projects promise to create more than 15,000 new jobs, and generate capital investment of more than £2.4 billion.

The regional selective assistance budget next year will be the biggest ever at £70 million—27 per cent. more than this year. That demonstrates our commitment to bringing new jobs to Wales, and through that and other industry support schemes, we are helping Welsh companies to take advantage of our record inward investments.

Taken together, the measures that I have announced today provide for economic development of more than £300 million next year. That is a 14 per cent. increase on planned spending for this year, and represents a huge investment in the future of Wales.

I have set before the House my clear priorities. They are clear choices, and to do anything else would compromise the successes of recent years. What we propose now will build on those successes.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. Those of us lucky enough to read yesterday's *Western Mail* were treated to a preview. I want to put on record my protest to you, Madam Speaker, and to the Secretary of State, for what I regard as a gross discourtesy to Welsh Members of Parliament. It is clear that the *Western Mail* received an accurate and deliberate briefing from the Welsh Office.

To make matters worse, the information that it was given on Tuesday is precisely the information that the Secretary of State chose to withhold from Welsh Members at last week's meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee. Does that not show yet again the contempt that the present Administration has for our democratic procedures, especially for the way in which Welsh affairs are run?

Earlier this week, the Deputy Prime Minister strongly attacked what he called the "leak culture". Does the Secretary of State agree with that view? If so, will he now apologise to Welsh Members and to you, Madam Speaker, for his actions and for those of people working on his behalf in deliberately leaking the information contained in today's statement?

There is clearly a difference of opinion between us on the Government's overall spending plans. Do the plans that the Secretary of State announced confirm the figures in his press release of 26 November? That press release stated that there will be a reduction in real-terms expenditure in the total Welsh Office budget next year of 0.9 per cent., a cut of 2.3 per cent. the following year both in cash terms and in real terms, and a further cut of 1.6 per cent. by the end of the decade.

Does the Secretary of State understand that those cuts reflect badly on the economic record of a Government who are failing to meet their inflation, borrowing and growth forecasts? Above all, the Government are not taking the right decisions on investment, either in the private sector or in their own spending programmes.

The Secretary of State should realise that his statement shows what everyone now recognises as the Government's true character: they do not plan for the future, and their priority is to promote privilege for the few, not opportunities for the many. Why should anyone believe his forecast for local government—the largest sector—when we all know that he is, at best, dissembling? His total standard spending for next year is £2,931.1 million. That is a cash increase of 66.3 million on last year's expenditure, but spending for the current year in local government is already £207 million more than next year's TSS. Inevitably, therefore, inadequate resources will be available to meet the demands placed on local authorities to provide essential public services.

Why has the Secretary of State not noted the warnings of the Welsh Local Government Association of a meltdown in services? Does he realise that, even with the—I understand—1.8 per cent. capping limit that he has announced today, council tax increases are likely to be substantial for the average band D property in a number of local authorities? The increase is likely to be over £65 in the Vale of Glamorgan, over £60 in Aberconwy, over £82 in Carmarthenshire, over £65 in Pembrokeshire, over £81 in Neath and Port Talbot, over £63 in Cardiff and £76.50 in Cardiganshire. Even if the Secretary of State achieves his maximum figure of 15 per cent., average increases in Wales are still likely to be some 12 or 13 per cent. in council tax bills.

Does that not show that any small benefit that was given with one hand in the Budget will be more than taken back in next year's Tory tax increase? Does the Secretary of State realise that, even with the tax increases, the quality of services will fall, with education—which takes 50 per cent. of total local government spending—bearing the brunt of the cuts? Is that not a clear example of the Government's sacrificing the long-term future of our country?

Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that, over the past two years, pupil numbers in Wales have increased by 10,873, while teacher numbers have fallen by 69? Why should educational opportunities for our children be declining in that way, while the Government plan to waste £45 million next year on the right hon. Gentleman's unwanted and bureaucratic nursery voucher scheme?

This year's Welsh Office spending on the national health service, including the extra £30 million that the Secretary of State added in his winter supplementary estimate, is £2,305 million. I think that the Secretary of State and I agree on that. That figure, however, has produced a current-year spending cash crisis in the NHS, with an astonishing one in three trusts in Wales in deficit at the halfway point this year. If we take into account that winter supplementary estimate of £30 million, there is in fact an increase of £64 million, not £94 million as the Secretary of State tried to claim a moment ago. I fear that he is dissembling again.

How much of next year's apparent cash increase will be swallowed up in covering the deficits in trust and health authority budgets at the end of the current financial year? In particular, what proposals has the Secretary of State to assist general practitioners and hospitals with their emergency medical admissions in the coming winter, to avoid a repeat of last year's disasters?

Does the Secretary of State recall last year's extravagant claims about the PFI? Does he recall talking of 25 projects with a total value of £1 billion, and the claim that he made on 13 December last year? He said then:

"We will announce very soon the first major PFI project in Wales".—[*Official Report*, 13 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 1002.]

Will the Secretary of State now confirm that the only agreed projects under way to date are the £6 million car park and road scheme at UCH Cardiff, and the Osiris project in his own office? Will he now apologise for having grossly inflated his estimates last year, and will he reflect on the words of Mr. Ken Gill, Welsh managing director of Jarvis and Son, who said on Tuesday this week that he could not wait for the election of a Labour Government who could sort out the PFI mess and use the PFI to supplement public money, not to replace it?

May I remind the Secretary of State of our firm support for the development agencies? Is it not the case, however, that the Welsh Development Agency will still come under great strain, even with expenditure at the £85 million that the right hon. Gentleman has just announced? In real terms, that £85 million is not much greater than the £70 million allocation that existed before his predecessor embarked on a programme of savage cuts in the agency budget.

Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the WDA's budget has been going up and down like a yo-yo, courtesy of the prevailing political dogma in the Welsh Office? Will he confirm, therefore, that, given his budget and its commitments to the LG project, the agency will face a difficult year? Given that that is true, how can he expect the agency to develop a long-term strategy when it is subject to such dramatic and capricious changes in its funding? Why has the Secretary of State allowed the management and the administrative costs of the top 10 quangos in Wales to increase by £52 million—an increase of 95 per cent.—while simultaneously making cuts in the budget of a whole sector of Welsh Office activity?

Let me list the cuts that I have identified from the right hon. Gentleman's statement. There are cuts in local authority revenue expenditure and in local authority capital programmes, a cut of 30 per cent.—£25 million—in the housing budget, a cut in road programmes of 30 per cent., and a cut in Higher Education Funding Council expenditure of 5 per cent. There are cuts in the budgets of the Further Education Funding Council and of the Development Board for Rural Wales, and cuts in real terms in the budget of the Countryside Council for Wales. Despite the Secretary of State's claims, if the comparison is made in real terms with the 1995-96 outturn cut, there has been a cut in the budget of the CCW, his pet quango.

There have been cuts in the budgets of the national library, the National Museums and Galleries of Wales, the Sports Council for Wales, the Wales tourist board, the CADW agency and the agriculture budget. What assessment is the Secretary of State making of the impact of those cuts on the Welsh economy? Unfortunately, we did not receive any indication that the Secretary of State even understands, let alone has started to assess, their impact on the Welsh economy.

Does not the fact that, last year, the Secretary of State announced a £2 million survey of housing conditions in Wales and, this year, a £25 million cut in housing provision, demonstrate how profligate his judgment is and how devoid he is of any long-term strategy for the improvement of economic and social conditions in Wales?

Does the Secretary of State realise that this budget does not reflect the priorities of the people of Wales? The role of Government should be to provide prospects for future economic development, to improve the quality of public services and to serve the needs of the community, not the vested interests of a privileged few. This budget does not provide a basis for that. His Government have failed to recognise that the new Government who will be elected shortly will face a challenging time dealing with the legacy of his wasteful, selfish and short-sighted administration.

Mr. Hague: I and the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) can agree on one point: the carrying by the *Western Mail* of one element of my statement in its edition yesterday was regrettable. That leak is being investigated. I will be happy to let him know what comes of that investigation.

After that, virtually everything in the hon. Gentleman's question was mistaken or wrong in one way or another. He referred to what he believes to be an increase in the costs of non-departmental public bodies. No one else in Wales recognises his figures. The running costs of those bodies have been flat in cash terms for the past two years, and will be reduced, as I have explained, in the coming year.

The hon. Gentleman had the nerve to criticise the Government's economic record, even referring to inflation and growth. No Labour Government in history have achieved the combination of low inflation, steady growth, falling unemployment and booming exports that exists in this country and that has brought unemployment in Wales down to below 100,000. He had the amazing nerve to criticise my statement as not representing opportunities for the many, yet the statement increases the number of modern apprenticeships and of adult technicians, raises capital spending for schools to the highest level ever, and raises economic development budgets by 14 per cent. in total.

The hon. Gentleman described the WDA as having a difficult year, but it has had the most successful year it has ever enjoyed, as almost everyone else in Wales is aware. I have also announced further increases in its budget in my statement.

The hon. Gentleman calculated that council tax increases would average as much as 12 or 13 per cent. However, based on the capping principles which I have just announced, it is not possible that average increases could be anywhere near that amount. As I explained in my statement, the maximum—the maximum of maximums—would be 15 per cent. Most authorities would be capped at a much lower figure, and many would be capped on anything more than a very small increase.

The hon. Gentleman criticised our record on education. This year, however, there has been an improvement in examination results, and, next year—based on the spending figures I have announced today—there will be more students in higher and further education in Wales than ever before.

The hon. Gentleman criticised my statement for not setting out a plan for the long-term future—but my statement was precisely that. It is a plan that provides for investment in education, investment in the creation of jobs and investment in our health service. He criticised the health service figures, yet he will not match the

[Mr. Hague]

commitment that I have given to increase health spending by more than the inflation rate in every year of the next Parliament. He and those on the Opposition Front Bench have still refused to match that commitment, which makes their criticism of health spending sound very hollow.

The hon. Gentleman said that the statement does not reflect the priorities of the people of Wales. I think that the creation of jobs, support for education, encouragement of modern apprenticeship schemes and a strong health service are exactly the priorities of the people of Wales, and today I am implementing those priorities.

The hon. Gentleman, throughout his question, criticised reductions while welcoming increases. If not for the reductions that I have announced, we would not be able to have the announced increases. The alternative would be to have higher total spending. Therefore, in future—as he is trying to be all things to all people—he will have to answer the question of which increases he does not want. Does he not want increased spending on health or—it was an implication throughout his question—increased spending on the economic development agencies?

My statement reflects the priorities of the people of Wales, and I am confident that that is how it will be received.

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): May I assure my right hon. Friend that the people of Wales will welcome his statement, and particularly its main thrust—to support prosperity, and to promote personal prosperity? May I also assure him that other aspects of his statement will be particularly welcomed, such as the cancer centre which will be developed in north Wales, the apprenticeship schemes, his additional spending on schools and the road developments from Dolwyddelan to Pont Afanc, in my constituency, and the A55, across Anglesey?

Is it not clear from the comments of the hon. Member for Caerphilly that the Opposition have no idea what their plans might be? Is it not they who are dissembling—because they would be spending on assembling the assembly, with all the costs that that bureaucracy would involve?

Mr. Hague: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, and I agree with his remarks. The statement is about building on the success that we have achieved in recent years—in encouraging new jobs and investment, and in bringing new prosperity to Wales—and sets out the resources that will enable us to continue doing so in the future. I welcome his welcome for projects such as the north Wales cancer treatment centre and road projects in north Wales. Few people have done more than he has to ensure that the infrastructure of north Wales—including the development of the A55, with which, through private finance, we will now continue—is improved and ready to cope with the future.

My right hon. Friend is quite right on those matters. He is also correct in saying that, whereas I have stated clear priorities and made clear decisions to increase some budgets, even if that means reducing others, those on the Opposition Front Bench have demonstrated no such sense of priorities, or an ability to choose between one proposal and another.

Sir Raymond Powell (Ogmore): There is something wrong with the procedures of the House of Commons when the Secretary of State can say that the papers that he will speak about can be obtained from the Vote Office and, before any Back Bencher can get a copy or know what he is going to say, he delivers his speech. I went to get the papers—it took me a while—and by the time I got back into the Chamber, the Secretary of State had been speaking for some five to 10 minutes. How can we represent the interests of our people and our constituencies in documents that cover the whole 12 months of expenditure in Wales with such a short time to consider them? How can we question the Secretary of State, on behalf of the local authorities we represent, on all the subjects that he covered?

Some months ago, I asked a question at Welsh question time about the £7 million shortfall in funding for the Bridgend and Ogmore constituencies in the Bridgend county council borough. I received an offhand reply with no explanation and I now want to know whether the county council—represented by both my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) and myself—will be refunded for the £7 million shortfall for last year, in addition to any increase that is due this year, so that we can consider reopening the school that we closed in Ogmore-by-Sea and the swimming pool that we closed in the Ogmore valley, and so that the schools with 39 pupils in their classes—

Madam Speaker: Order. I not only have to safeguard this Welsh statement and see that all hon. Members concerned are able to put questions, but I have the other business of the House to safeguard, too. I am asking for questions, because I have heard a lot of comments since the Secretary of State sat down, and I must have brisk and direct questions that the Secretary of State can answer. Will the hon. Gentleman put a direct question, and give the Secretary of State an opportunity to answer directly and briskly?

Sir Raymond Powell: I shall be direct, and ask quick questions.

Why has the Secretary of State suggested reducing funding for training? Training is essential in our local authorities and, despite what my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) said, I can confirm that a lot of jiggery-pokery goes on with the figures. That is one question. The new local authorities have been in operation for eight months since the Government introduced them. Has the Secretary of State had any complaints whatever from any new unitary local authority in Wales about funding?

Madam Speaker *rose—*

Sir Raymond Powell: I will not go on any further.

Madam Speaker: Even my Christmas spirit of good will is being stretched by all those questions.

Mr. Hague: The hon. Member is worried about the chance to debate local authority matters, but we will, of course, have to have a debate on local authority finance to discuss my proposals. We usually have that debate some time in the new year—last year, it was passed by a majority of 72—and the hon. Gentleman will be able to speak at greater length in that debate. The money will be distributed among local authorities by the standard

spending assessment formula, which is agreed with the Welsh Local Government Association, and I am always happy to discuss changes in the formula.

The hon. Gentleman asked about money for training. I am redistributing the budget for training, and there will be a reduction in the training for work programme, but there will be an increase in spending on modern apprenticeships and adult technicians, because I think that they are more important and give better value for money.

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): I welcome my right hon. Friend's emphasis on the importance of modern apprenticeships, which have attracted many welcome jobs to Wales, and particularly to Vale of Glamorgan. I wish to question my right hon. Friend on the roads programme that he has announced. As he knows, I am keen that there should be a new link road with the Cardiff international airport. He mentioned a number of road projects, but I did not hear him mention that project, and I wonder whether he could enlighten me.

Mr. Hague: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is quite right to emphasise the importance of modern apprenticeships. Inward investors, who have been flocking to Wales, want to know that we have the right standards and procedures for training, and increasing the number of modern apprenticeships is part of that.

I have provided money in this year's Budget settlement for preparatory work on a possible new link road to the airport. There is money in this year's provision for that preparatory work to continue, but the plans have been changing, and it is for the local authority to propose a specific road plan for a link to the airport.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Was it not the Secretary of State's party that coined the rather horrible phrase "a double whammy"? Are not most of our communities going to suffer "a double whammy"—first, an increase in council taxes that is way above wage increases in our communities and will more than wipe out any so-called tax cuts, and secondly, cuts in school budgets? If the latter cut is made, would the right hon. Gentleman be willing to review the figures?

Mr. Hague: The level of council tax will be set by local authorities. In this settlement, I am providing 88 per cent. of total standard spending for Welsh local government. If I had provided a higher proportion—the figure is already dramatically higher than the 79 per cent. provided in England—I would not have been able to accommodate many of the other measures that I have set out in my statement. The settlement strikes the right balance of priorities, and will result in more capital spending on schools. Of course, it means that local authorities must continue to make every possible effort to be efficient and to use resources wisely. There is still more scope for many of them to do that.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The Secretary of State said that he did not want disproportionate investment in south-east Wales, and that he had instructed the development agencies to prepare key investment sites. Does he recognise that that may be a change from the failures of the past—a sort of deathbed repentance? Does he further agree that, to offset the imbalance, one needs an across-the-board strategy to recognise what has gone wrong in the past—for example, the savage cuts in agency funding—and the failure to build against the natural locational advantages of south-east Wales? Will he look at a strategy across the board in favour of other parts of Wales?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman cannot talk about failures in the past. Bringing Lucky Goldstar to south-east Wales—the biggest inward investment in the history of Europe—was not a failure of past policy, but a tremendous success for Wales. It also provides a tremendous opportunity for the whole of Wales, since at least as many jobs again can be provided all over Wales in supplying such an operation. We must not lose sight of that.

It is certainly true that, in the light of the huge success that we have enjoyed with that project and others near it, a greater effort is needed to make sure that future inward investments—wherever possible—go to other areas of Wales, or are helped to go further west or further north. Sometimes, the agency should be prepared to pay more for projects that go further west or north, and less for projects that go to areas that have done well in recent years. I agree that we need a strategy for the future, but it is not right to talk about failure in the past.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Does the Secretary of State agree that the figures that he has announced today and those in the Red Book indicate that, in real terms, we will have a cut of £590 million in Government funding for Wales in the next three years? Since it is implicit in what he says that none of those cuts will be in health services, does it not automatically follow that £590 million of cuts will have to be met in other services? Since education is the major cost for local authorities, how on earth does he think that efficiency gains will enable local authorities to absorb cuts of that scale?

Mr. Hague: I have been straightforward in setting out how increases in some areas will require reductions in others. Reductions will be needed in the coming year in the roads programme and in total local authority capital spending—although not in schools—to accommodate increases elsewhere. The right hon. Gentleman is right to think that we have to make a trade-off. Unfortunately, it is a recognition that is not shared by his colleagues on the Labour Front Bench.

In the longer term, the Government are committed to reducing the proportion of gross domestic product spent by the state. That means that we have to get more out of public expenditure and the majority of Departments have published in the survey plans that will imply reductions in real terms over a long period. We have added to the plans of the Welsh Office in this survey, and plans for future years will be revisited in future years.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Given that the Secretary of State has announced capping of 1.8 per cent. on local government spending over last year, that we face inflation of 2.7 per cent. and that local authorities need to take into account pay increases for teachers, increases in fire authority budgets and increases as a result of their new statutory responsibilities under the landfill tax, does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that the proposed settlements for local authorities will inevitably mean cuts in many of their services?

[Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones]

Given that the education budget accounts for almost half of local authority spending, does he not recognise that those cuts will put 1,000 teacher's jobs at risk in Wales and make class sizes much larger? Does he not recognise that social services will also be badly hit? How can he say that this is a good settlement for local authorities in Wales?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman should not be misled by the 1.8 per cent. The way in which capping works is complicated, but I said a 1.8 per cent. increase or the increase in the standard spending assessment, whichever is the greater. In many cases, that will be greater than that 1.8 per cent. figure.

The key figures are that the support that central Government are giving to local government will increase in this settlement by 2.6 per cent., which is a £64 million increase. That is about the current rate of inflation, and more than the forecast rate for the coming year. Local authorities have to learn to live within settlements that are around about the rate of inflation. The laws of economics are not suspended for local authorities, and they should be able to deliver their services without reducing them with settlements that provide them with an increase in line with the rate of inflation.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Does the Secretary of State accept that the figures that he has announced for the health service—a 4 per cent. increase on the plans for this year compared with next year—represent a real-terms cut because of the substantial non-recurrent expenditure that has taken place this year? In fact, the figure is far below 4 per cent. and he is not honouring his claim that there would be year-on-year increases in the health service.

Can the right hon. Gentleman also confirm that council tax payers will be faced with substantial rises while at the same time there will be substantial cuts, particularly in the education provided in our schools and in the social services provided to those in our community who need them? There may well be threats throughout Wales to residential homes provided by local councils. Can he also tell us why, despite the delegations from south-west Wales that have seen him about the need to improve communications to that area, he has made no announcement about improvements to the roads leading from the A40 to Pembroke Dock and Fishguard?

Mr. Hague: There were several questions there. On health spending, we have to compare like with like. I am comparing the plans at this point with the plans last year. Of course, there are often changes in year, but there will no doubt be changes in year in future years as well. I am adding £94 million compared to last year's spending plans.

Local authorities are receiving in total an extra £64 million. If Opposition Members think that the increase in the money we give to local authorities should be more than £64 million in the coming year, they need to come to the debate that we will hold next January or February on the local government settlement and say what the amount ought to be. They have to bear in it mind that that means either a higher level of spending or reductions in other programmes, neither of which they seem prepared to admit to advocating. That is what they have to face up to.

I have explained that I think that the other areas to which I have chosen to direct increased resources in the coming year are higher priorities than the roads programme. I am certain that the health service, the promotion of jobs and modern apprenticeships, and capital spending on schools are higher priorities; other people may disagree, but I am convinced that that is the right judgment.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The governor-general has claimed that he is fulfilling the political priorities of the people of Wales. How is he doing that by taking even more money from our least-favoured schools with the most problems and giving it to our most-favoured schools with the fewest problems, by trying to impose grant-maintained status, which was rejected by my constituents by an 87 per cent. majority in a recent poll, and by trying to impose on Wales an unwanted nursery vouchers system, when the Government's survey of popular opinion in Wales found that 5,000 people were against it and only one person in favour? Are not the Secretary of State's educational priorities alien, irrelevant and damaging to Wales?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman has not understood that choice and diversity in education improve educational opportunity for everyone. That is demonstrated by the improved performance of our schools over the past year. He has not noticed that nursery vouchers are bringing additional resources of between £4 million and £5 million into nursery education in Wales.

The hon. Gentleman asks how I know what the priorities of people in Wales are. I have noticed that the one thing that nobody in Wales ever stops me in the street and asks me to spend more money on is setting up an assembly full of politicians wasting their time in Cardiff.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I welcome the Secretary of State's comments on the Carmarthen eastern bypass, and I am pleased that it is going ahead and will not involve the private finance initiative. More generally, however, he dressed up the statement as representing growth here and increases there, but that belies numerous cuts in highways, housing and other areas. Is not the summary of his statement given in the first paragraph, which says that the budget of £6.9 billion is £100 million more than this year's? That is an increase of only 1.4 per cent., at a time when inflation is at 2.7 per cent. Is that not in truth a cut of 1 per cent. in what the Welsh Office is doing for the economy of Wales?

Mr. Hague: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for my remarks about the Carmarthen eastern bypass. He said that the statement was dressed up as increases and growth everywhere, but that is not the case. I explained that I deliberately made increases in some areas, and I said clearly that there will have to be reductions in others. There is no dressing up; there is a clear choice of priorities. We want to increase some things, and to do it we have to reduce others. What has been absent from the debate is any sense among Opposition Members of choosing priorities, because they want to be all things to all people: they want to criticise every reduction and still have every increase.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Is the Secretary of State aware that Rhondda Cynon Taff contains some of

the hardest hit and poorest communities in Wales? What does he intend to do to scotch the rumours that we will lose hundreds of teaching jobs because the local authority simply will not be able to afford to employ teachers in the future? Those are not bare statistics, but extremely difficult choices that will have to be made. We have heard nothing this afternoon that will give anyone any hope that those awful redundancies will not become a reality.

Mr. Hague: Such stories are given currency by local authorities to reinforce their negotiating position and are then quoted by hon. Members in the House. Today, I have set out a £64 million increase in the amount that the Government will give to local authorities next year. It will be distributed among them according to the formula that is agreed with them. If Opposition Members think that the increase should be greater, they will have to say where they would obtain the money.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Does the Secretary of State have any additional damping provision above that previously announced for Neath and Port Talbot? Depending on his answer, I am either extremely angry or absolutely livid. Last year, we had cuts of £10 million, and lost 35 teachers. This year, I estimate additional cuts of £7 million and that 25 teachers will be sacked. Last year, we had a 25 per cent. increase in council tax, an average of £125. This year, I estimate that it will be 15 per cent., nearly £90.

That will mean that council tax will have risen by more than 40 per cent. in two years. How can the Secretary of State possibly think that local people can pay that sort of money? He is strangling local communities in Wales. He should apologise and be ashamed of himself.

Mr. Hague: As I have explained, the Government provide, one way or another, 88 per cent. of the money spent by local authorities in Wales. That proportion is dramatically higher than in England. Last year, I introduced two damping schemes to protect people faced by very large council tax rises; this year I do not contemplate any additional damping on top.

Mr. Hain: Now I am livid.

Mr. Hague: I am distressed that the hon. Gentleman is now livid, but he will understand that the £18 million damping scheme that I announced in my statement will mean that the maximum council tax increase for any authority in Wales will be 15 per cent. However, the maximum increase that most authorities can impose will be dramatically less than that. We are dealing with a situation quite different from last year. The large differential between English and Welsh council taxes will at the least be maintained.

Business of the House

4.25 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): I should like to make a statement about the business for next week and for the week after the recess:

MONDAY 16 DECEMBER—Debate on the common fisheries policy on a Government motion.

TUESDAY 17 DECEMBER—Progress on the Protection from Harassment Bill.

WEDNESDAY 18 DECEMBER—Until 2 pm, debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House, of which the first will be the three-hour debate that I normally wind up.

Conclusion of proceedings on the Protection from Harassment Bill.

Second Reading of the National Heritage Bill *[Lords]*.

The House will wish to know that, subject to the progress of business, it is proposed that the House should rise for the Christmas recess on Wednesday 18 December until Monday 13 January.

The business for the first week back after the Christmas recess will be as follows:

MONDAY 13 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Crime (Sentences) Bill.

TUESDAY 14 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Finance Bill.

WEDNESDAY 15 JANUARY—Until 2 pm, debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Remaining stages of the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill.

THURSDAY 16 JANUARY—Subject to progress in Committee, remaining stages of the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Bill.

FRIDAY 17 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

The House will also wish to know that on Tuesday 17 December there will be a debate on the information society in European Standing Committee B, and that on Wednesday 18 December there will be a debate on the social dialogue in European Standing Committee B.

It will also be proposed that on Wednesday 15 January there will be a debate on the draft general budget for 1997 in European Standing Committee B.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report.*

[Tuesday 17 December 1996:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community Document: 9795/96, The Information Society: priorities and implications. Relevant European Legislation Committee Report: HC 36-i (1996-97).

Wednesday 18 December 1996:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community Document: 10305/96, Development of the Social Dialogue. Relevant European Legislation Committee Report: HC 36-ii (1996-97).

Wednesday 15 January 1997:

Relevant European Community Documents: (a) 9372/96, Draft general budget 1997; (b) SEC(96)1677, Letter of amendment No. 1 to the preliminary draft budget 1997; (c) PE 252 724, 1997

Budget; (d) Unnumbered, Letter of amendment No. 2 to the preliminary draft budget 1997; (e) Unnumbered, Amendments to the draft general budget 1997. Relevant European Legislation Committee Reports: (a) and (b) HC 36-i (1996-97); (c) HC 36-iii (1996-97); (d) HC 36-iv and HC 36-vii (1996-97); (e) HC 36-v (1996-97).]

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I thank the Leader of the House for that information. The House will be grateful that he was able to give us an idea of business during the first week back, which will help hon. Members.

The Leader of the House knows that the first meeting of the Highlands and Islands Convention is to be held in Inverness on Monday afternoon. The hon. Members who will attend have a significant interest in the fisheries debate which is to be held in the House at exactly the same time. Can we have an assurance that such clashes will be avoided in future? Hon. Members will face great difficulty in representing their constituencies in two places at the same time.

In view of the recent meeting of the Millennium Commission and the concerns about the future of the millennium exhibition, would not it be appropriate for the Secretary of State for National Heritage to make a statement to the House before we rise for the Christmas recess so that we can be kept informed about that project, which involves large sums of money?

The Leader of the House will be aware that he has been unable to grant our request for an Opposition day between the Budget and Christmas. May we have an assurance that, in the new year, Opposition days will be given the priority that they deserve in business planning?

What will happen to the Welsh Development Agency Bill in the new year?

When the House returns after the recess, is the writ for the Wirral, South by-election likely to be moved?

In view of significant public concern about food safety, which stretches back over many years—with scares about salmonella, listeria, BSE and now E. coli—will the Government find time to debate the positive steps that could be taken were they to accept the Labour party's policy of introducing an independent food standards agency?

Mr. Newton: I thank the hon. Lady for her words at the beginning of her response.

I regret the possible clash of commitments for Scottish Members—particularly on Monday—but there would have been complaints if we had not had the fisheries debate before the Fisheries Council, which is what the House would expect and is the cause of the clash. If there were an obvious way of avoiding the clash, I would happily find it, but as far as I can judge there is not.

I shall draw the hon. Lady's request about the Millennium Commission to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage. I note that my right hon. Friend is the next Minister to answer questions in the House—she is due to answer them on Monday.

I am grateful for the moderate way in which the hon. Lady made her point about Opposition days, and I know that she appreciates the problems that we have had recently. I shall bear in mind the need for Opposition time when I consider future business.

We shall seek to make progress on the Welsh Development Agency Bill as soon as possible, but I cannot predict exactly when that will be.

On the subject of the Wirral, South by-election, the hon. Lady will be aware that the memorial service for our late colleague took place only this morning, and it is certainly not customary to think about moving writs before such a service. I am sure that my right hon. Friends who are concerned with such matters will, when appropriate, consider the timing of the writ.

On the subject of food safety, the Government will seek to consider the lessons to be learnt from the latest outbreak, but I cannot draw conclusions from it in the way that the hon. Lady suggested.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): Will my right hon. Friend allow the House time to debate civil air transport policy either before the Christmas recess or in the first week after it? Is he aware that there are issues of great importance that should be debated in Government time—the proposed alliance between British Airways and American Airlines, the possibility of a slot auction at Heathrow airport, the continuing Bermuda 2 air service agreement negotiations between the United States and the United Kingdom, with the necessity for more gateways for British carriers into the United States, and the fact that the new noise regulations are due to come into force on 1 January? Those are important matters for my constituents and the country as a whole.

Mr. Newton: I certainly acknowledge the importance of those matters for my hon. Friend's constituents. I also acknowledge my hon. Friend's expertise in the matter, but I cannot immediately promise a debate. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is the first Minister due to answer questions after the recess.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Does the Leader of the House recognise the great concern, felt in several parts of the country that have Ministry of Defence establishments, about possible changes to the MOD police force? Is he prepared to allow a full debate in the House on the Army Terms of Service (Amendment) Regulations 1996, against which a prayer has been laid by two prominent members of the Conservative party as well as the leader of the Opposition and me?

Mr. Newton: I cannot promise a debate, despite the fact that the MOD police headquarters is in my constituency. I plainly have an interest in the matter. On the latter point, I shall look into what the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Given the staggering news, which is just coming through, that the Labour party has been seeking to fix the "Today" BBC personality of the year and that "Today", the BBC Radio 4 programme, has suspended that operation pending a proper investigation, could we have a debate on public standards in public life and the independence of the BBC, to ensure that we properly air how the Labour party is seeking to manipulate the media?

Mr. Newton: That sounds an extremely attractive proposition on the basis of the intelligence that my hon. Friend has communicated to the House. At least one

member of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges is in his place and suggesting that we should take that matter on as well. I would have to pass on that one for the moment.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Opposition are likely to defeat the Government in Monday's vote on the fisheries motion—due to the Government's lack of a majority, especially after today's by-election? Will the Government make provision for a confidence motion on Tuesday? Many people can smell the decay and rottenness of the Government. They are on their last legs; it is time that they were wrapped up—giving everybody a Christmas present. Let us have an election and sort it all out.

Mr. Newton: Great as is my desire to please the hon. Gentleman, as ever, even to the point of being willing to give him a Christmas present, I do not think that it will be that one.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Would it be appropriate to have a debate on the shortfall in tax revenues since about 1990, when three hon. Members tried to smuggle a video camera through Customs? Those hon. Members have never been punished. Indeed, one of them sits on the Opposition Front Bench to this day.

Mr. Newton: I think that you, Madam Speaker, would probably be with me in saying that, if there are matters that ought to be investigated in respect of hon. Members' conduct, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on them on the Floor of the House. It would be appropriate to draw them to the attention of the Parliamentary Commissioner.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): The problem with the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) is that he gives slap heads a bad name, which I greatly resent.

My question relates to coal mines, all of which in Derbyshire have been closed, the last one being closed by the Deputy Prime Minister. Many pits and drift mines have been closed, which has created a great problem of abandoned mine shafts. There is a Select Committee report on the matter. Can we debate it? I believe that slots are available on a Wednesday morning for the discussion of Select Committee reports.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman makes a serious point that deserves a serious response. He is right: there is provision for some debates on Select Committee reports, some of them on Wednesday mornings. We have had some such debates recently. They are normally chosen on the advice of the Liaison Committee, so the hon. Gentleman might care to make his representations to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins).

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Can my right hon. Friend find time for a full day's debate on the Floor of the House on trade union reform? Not only would it give me the opportunity to talk about how effective it has been, and to say that the United Kingdom has some of the lowest levels of strikes since records began, it would allow me to share with the House the views of a left-wing Labour councillor from Burnley, Marcus Johnstone, who said during the most recent strikes in Paris—when the police were being pelted with stones, petrol bombs were being thrown and cars were being overturned—that they were a great inspiration for us all and that it was a great shame that people in this country did not demonstrate in exactly the same way against a right-wing Government. That is shocking in itself, but Marcus Johnstone has been selected as the Labour party's candidate to fight me at the next general election.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend has found a most ingenious way in which to draw his constituents' attention to his opponent's views. It sounds to me as if he is lucky in his opponent.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will there be an opportunity next week to debate the report of the Standards and Privileges Committee? Is the Leader of the House aware that many of us would like the opportunity to congratulate the Committee on demonstrating that an all-party Committee and self-regulation can work? If it can work on this occasion, it can work on others.

Would it not be useful if the Press Complaints Commission also could demonstrate that it is an effective self-regulating body?

Mr. Newton: Perhaps I might take that question as being directed principally at the Standards and Privileges Committee. I am sure that its members will be grateful for what the hon. Gentleman said.

I shall ensure that what the hon. Gentleman said about the Press Complaints Commission is drawn to the attention of Lord Wakeham, who is its chairman.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we have a debate as soon as possible on the use being made of facilities of the House? I understand that a Labour party document has been found on a photocopier, no doubt after hundreds of copies had been made, which explains how people can go about voting for the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) in the personality of the year contest on the BBC "Today" programme. That has apparently led to the BBC's realising that it has been had by a Labour party spoof, and closing down the contest this year—which is, I believe, unprecedented.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend emphasises the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin). I increasingly think that the photocopier is one of the most dangerous things ever invented.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Leader of the House might think that I am harassing him, but why is Northern Ireland not included in the Protection from Harassment Bill, and why has the Northern Ireland Grand Committee not yet been called to deal with the Budget implications for Northern Ireland in light of the Prime Minister's statement a few weeks ago? Is he, like me, grateful that, for once, the European Court appears to have acted wisely—by throwing out the objections to the Hualon investment in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Newton: I note with satisfaction the hon. Gentleman's last remark. On the first two points, I shall take the questions as representations and consider them.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): May we have an early debate on early-day motion 4?

[*That this House calls on the Government to acknowledge that over 3,000 people with haemophilia have been infected with the hepatitis C virus (HCV) as a result of NHS treatment with contaminated blood products, to recognise that over 60 people with haemophilia are now understood to have died from liver disease contracted as a result, and to consider giving similar financial assistance to those infected with HCV, who currently receive no additional help, as for those infected in the same way with HIV who have been compensated by the Government.*]

It has now been signed by 273 Members of the House—a majority of those eligible to sign it.

Is my right hon. Friend aware that, yesterday, a petition signed by 30,000 people was handed in at No. 10 Downing street? It calls for a hardship fund to be set up for haemophiliacs who have been infected with hepatitis C? Does he agree that, in the spirit of Christmas, that would be a useful and moral gesture for our right hon. Friends to make?

Mr. Newton: Once again, I pay sincere tribute to my hon. Friend's persistence in raising this matter and the way in which he has pursued it. I believe that he initiated a Wednesday morning Adjournment debate on that subject only yesterday. He will understand that I am not in a position to add to what the Minister said to him then.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): There seems to be an avoidance therapy on the issue of Monday's business in the House. Hon. Members such as me, who represent a highland seat, must try to be in two places at once, and at a time when travel can be very difficult. It may not be possible for members of the Highlands and Islands Convention to return to the House in time to vote, far less to speak in the debate. How on earth was that conflict reached by the usual channels? Who discussed the matter? Who decided that the common fisheries policy should be debated on the same day as the first meeting of the Highlands and Islands Convention? It seems to me that that is either sabotage of scrutiny or sabotage of the fishing industry.

Mr. Newton: It is not intended as sabotage of anything. We need to hold the fisheries debate before the Fisheries Council, and Monday seems the appropriate day on which to hold it.

Mrs. Ewing: What about Tuesday?

Mr. Newton: I have no wish to engage in a confrontation with the hon. Lady. I am sorry about the clash, but I do not believe that it would be right to expect me to apologise for putting on the order of business business that the House clearly expects to conduct.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): May we have a focused debate on the proposed enlargement of NATO? The subject is often scooped up in defence or foreign affairs debates, but its importance must be emphasised. We should have a debate exclusively on this issue, bearing in mind that the general election will preoccupy us in the spring and there is a summit in Madrid in the early summer. It would be helpful if the House were able to discuss those changes, which are profoundly important for Europe and likely to occur this side of the general election battle.

Mr. Newton: That is a serious issue. The House has substantial opportunities to debate defence and related matters during the year, but I shall of course take note of the hon. Gentleman's suggestion.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Is the Leader of the House aware that there has been an outbreak of E. coli 0157 in my constituency this week, and that it is rumoured that it comes from contaminated milk from the adjoining constituency of the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans)? There is tremendous anxiety. Eight people have been affected, mostly in the West Craven part of my constituency. May we have a statement next week on the outbreak and, perhaps early in the new year, a more wide-ranging debate on food safety—of the type called for by my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor)?

Mr. Newton: I appreciate and respect the hon. Gentleman's reasons for raising that issue. I share his concern about the outbreak in his part of the world, just as I share the concern about the outbreak in Scotland. In his area's case, the outbreak is being investigated locally, and the Department of Health is keeping in close touch. I shall draw my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health's attention to the hon. Gentleman's request.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that, should, by some miracle, the IRA call a ceasefire, the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Bill will become a matter of considerable importance, and of greater interest than it currently is. To that end, we welcome the fact that, at the end of the week in which we return to this place, we shall finish considering that Bill in the House. Is he also aware that a similar Bill, designed to accomplish exactly the same ends, is being passed in Ireland at present? Will he arrange for copies of the Dail Eireann Bill to be placed in the Library of the House that so we can be assured that it does exactly what the United Kingdom Bill does? Will he arrange for there to be a debate or a statement on BSE next week?

Mr. Newton: I note both those requests. I shall ensure that that relating to the Irish version of the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Bill is brought to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Point of Order

4.47 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will recall the exchanges that took place earlier this afternoon on the statement on what has become known as the Welsh budget. At the outset of the statement, I mentioned the leak that took place earlier this week which led to accurate and comprehensive details of the statement appearing in the *Western Mail* on Tuesday. This is a matter of great concern to Welsh Members of Parliament because, at last week's meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee, we pressed the Secretary of State for the very information that appeared on Tuesday morning, and he refused to give it.

I was very grateful that the Secretary of State condemned the leak, and that he undertook to hold an inquiry, but I should like to ask you two questions. First, will you give your views on this matter, and say whether it would be appropriate for the Secretary of State to make a statement to the House on the conclusion of his inquiry, so that we can test whether it has been as full and as thorough as we would expect it to be? Secondly, what steps can you take to ensure that the inquiry is as full and as comprehensive as it should be?

The point that concerns me is that Welsh Members have been treated very discourteously, if not contemptuously, by someone in the Secretary of State's office, and I should like to be assured that the inquiry will examine not only the role that civil servants may have played in the matter, but whether Ministers have been responsible for leaking information—or whether it is the strange political animal that we have come to know as a political adviser. Will you advise me what steps you can take to ensure the fullest inquiry?

Madam Speaker: I noted the hon. Gentleman's comments when he drew this matter to the attention of the House earlier today. I am very concerned by what I heard at that time and by what I read in a newspaper yesterday. Our clear convention is that important statements must be made first to this House, and I deprecate it most strongly when the substance of a statement is revealed in the media before presentation to the House. I join the hon. Gentleman in welcoming the comments made by the Secretary of State today when he said that he would have this matter investigated to see how the situation arose. It is, of course, for the Secretary of State to determine whether he will seek to make a statement to the House, but I should have thought that, in the circumstances, he might keep the hon. Gentleman informed of his inquiries.

European Union

[Relevant documents: The White Paper on Developments in the European Union, January to June 1996 (Cm 3469); Presidency General Outline for a draft revision of the Treaties; The Commission's Work Programme for 1997: New Legislative Proposals (SEC(96)1819); The Commission's Work Programme for 1997: Political Priorities (COM(96)507); European Community Document No. 10867/96 on the introduction of the euro; European Community Document No. 10893/96 on reinforced convergence procedures and a new exchange rate mechanism; European Community Document No. 10892/96 on a stability pact for ensuring budgetary discipline in stage 3 of EMU; Second and Third Reports from the Select Committee on European Legislation of Session 1996–97 (HC 36-ii and 36-iii); Sixth Report from the Select Committee on European Legislation of Session 1996–97, European Documents on Economic and Monetary Union: the Scrutiny Process (HC 36-vi); Eighth Report from the Treasury Committee of Session 1995–96, The Prognosis for Stage Three of Economic and Monetary Union (HC 283-I and II); Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on European Legislation on 3rd December (HC 136-i); and Minutes of Evidence taken before the Foreign Affairs Committee on 5th and 9th December (HC 148-i and 148-ii).]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Madam Speaker: We now come to the second day of the debate on the European Union. I must let the House know that, again, speeches by Back Benchers will be limited to 10 minutes.

4.50 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): On this, the second day of our debate on the European Union, I wish to concentrate my remarks on the intergovernmental conference and the Dublin summit.

First, however, I will respond to certain remarks made by the President of the European Commission, who said the other day that the hour of truth was approaching when the United Kingdom would have to decide whether it believed in Europe as a free trade area or as a political union. Many hon. Members like to present the issue in equally Manichaean terms. It is reminiscent of choices that used to be urged upon British Governments: Commonwealth or Europe? America or Europe? Those have always been false choices because reality lies between such poles.

For Britain, the European Union is, and always was, more than a free trade area. For a start, the single market involves much more than the elimination of tariff barriers. That was the first and easiest step in its creation. It also needs rules to prevent non-tariff obstructions to trade, like the mediaeval rules on what could go into a pint of beer, which excluded British beers from Germany, or the rules on insurance policies, which eliminated competition, whether on price or product innovation, in much of the continental market.

All that involves supranational rules and supranational institutions, whether the Commission or the European Court, to enforce them. British consumers, workers and manufacturers have all benefited from those rules.

[Mr. Malcolm Rifkind]

It is strongly in the British interest that the EU should have a common external trade policy. There is a persistent continental instinct, particularly in France, to put up trade barriers around a fortress Europe. Yet those instincts were faced down by the Commission, which negotiated a market-opening GATT deal on behalf of us all. That would not have been possible—nor would we have been able to protect British commercial interests as well as we did—without strong European institutions.

If a simple free trade area was such a splendid option, why has the European Free Trade Association collapsed? Why did Sweden, Finland and Austria so quickly abandon the European economic area, which came into force only in 1994, in favour of full membership of the EU? The answer is that, to secure tariff-free access to the European Community, they found themselves having to follow single market rules and regulations, including competition policy, over which they had no control or influence. That may be a sustainable position for Iceland, Norway or Liechtenstein, but I hardly think that it would befit a country of our size and history.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I agree with the Foreign Secretary that the European Union is and should be more than a free trade area, but may I bring him to the specifics of the intergovernmental conference? A few months ago, the Prime Minister told the fishing industry that resolution of the flags of convenience scandal was his first priority at the IGC. A few weeks ago, however, we were told that the 48-hour week had become the major priority. I wish to ask a simple question: if the Prime Minister succeeds in resolving the flags of convenience issue, will he still block agreement until he gets his way on the 48-hour issue?

Mr. Rifkind: We have spellt out a number of crucial objectives, of which the issue that interests the hon. Gentleman is one. It is not necessary to add to that now. We have said that those are crucial matters and the conference cannot come to a conclusion unless all members are satisfied with the outcome.

Even in the area of commerce, the EU is much more than a free trade area. But its benefits are also felt in many areas not directly related to the market, such as increasing co-operation in the fight against international crime, higher environmental standards and an increasingly confident European voice on the world stage. The common foreign and security policy does not replace national foreign policy, but complements it. That works to our advantage, as other European countries' views on many issues are very close to ours, and a common European policy where it applies can exert greater influence than the UK could achieve on its own.

Above all, the European Union is the basis on which we can consolidate democracy and prosperity across the whole of Europe, including our central European neighbours.

Opponents of British membership of the EU like to argue that we joined a mere common market that has insidiously developed a political agenda. That is nonsense. The European Union has always had a political as well as an economic purpose. Britain recognised that very clearly when we went in: indeed, it was a central consideration behind our application for membership.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Yesterday, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he had no objection in principle to the idea of a single currency. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, in reply to me in the European Select Committee in February when I pressed him on economic and monetary union, said that he did not follow my point that it was a question of principle. Does my right hon. and learned Friend not accept that there is a basic and fundamental inconsistency in the views expressed on the question of principle by the Chancellor and by himself? Does he agree that that is causing a great deal of uncertainty and confusion, that the matter should be resolved, and that it should not be construed as dissembling?

Mr. Rifkind: I have no doubt whatever that the question of a single currency and the possible abolition of our national currency would be a great historic decision. It would probably be irreversible, so it is right that it should be addressed as one of the most important matters to be considered by a British Government for many years. I believe that every member of the Government believes that it is of crucial significance. It is therefore right to ensure that the issue is addressed with regard both to its economic implications and its wider consequences—the national decision making that we currently enjoy and the extent to which that might be diminished in the event of a single currency.

Mr. Norman Lamont (Kingston upon Thames): I should like to return to what my right hon. and learned Friend was saying about the European Union's functions and ask him a question that an ambassador of this country asked me. He asked me to explain to him why it was necessary for the European Union to have more than 120 embassies—or "delegations" as they are called—around the world at a cost of £150 million per year. Is it really necessary, given the European Union's functions, to have that degree of representation?

Mr. Rifkind: I would not necessarily wish to defend the exact number as it currently applies, but the European Union has overseas aid programmes in many countries and needs to implement those programmes through local offices. It is also responsible for handling the external trade policies of all its member states. Those external trade negotiations cannot be conducted without a physical presence in countries such as Japan or many other countries with a crucial involvement in trade matters. So while I am not inclined to justify every area of expenditure or every office, I acknowledge that the European Union needs a significant number of overseas premises to conduct its proper business.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Rifkind: I realise that an awful lot of hon. Members wish to speak in this debate. Although I do not intend to give way to everyone who wishes to intervene, I shall try to be fair.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Rifkind: Not at this moment, but perhaps later.

If Europe is more than a free trade area, it is less than a federal state and must remain so. The bedrock of the European Union is the independent democratic nation state. The European Union derives its legitimacy and functions from the powers freely given to it by its members. It can flourish only as a partnership of nations.

The Government have a clear view of what the European Union is, and how it should develop. It is a partnership of nations reconciled after centuries of rivalry and conflict. Those nations have a strong sense of shared purpose and shared values; they have created a single market open internally, and open to the rest of the world; they are committed to maximum co-operation in foreign and security policy and in such issues as the fight against international crime; and they have joined forces in the common enterprise of the European Union while retaining the separate identities that give Europe its richness and character.

Overall, and in its historical context, the degree of co-operation in Europe today is extraordinary and unprecedented. The European Union has been the focus of that achievement, but the quest for ever more institutional integration puts all that at risk.

If an hour of truth is approaching, it is perhaps for the integrationists in Europe, who need to define the limits of their ambition. Where do they see the process that they promote finding its natural conclusion? At what point will dynamism in the EU be measured in the use that we make of the institutions that we have created, rather than in their endless modification? At what point will integrationists accept that deeper is not always and necessarily better?

All sides decry the term "super-state". Chancellor Kohl agrees that independent democratic states are at the heart of the European project. Amen to that; yet if the EU is to be the basis of lasting peace and prosperity in Europe, and if people—not just in the UK—are to be reassured that they are not in the belly of some infernal machine that is running out of control, they need to feel that there is some logical conclusion to the process of European integration, short of a super-state.

That is why all the member states need to think hard about the purposes and limits of integration.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for giving way at this stage, as he is giving a fair and objective description of what the European Union should mean in the future. Would it not be better for the British Government to avoid the use of the word "federal", as it is so misleading? Too many people fear that it means centralisation, whereas it has many different meanings in different countries. NATO was a federal treaty in every respect and all the way through its clauses. It would be much better to refer to the use of majority voting and greater integration to enable enlargement to take place. That is the aim of the process.

Mr. Rifkind: I strongly disagree with my hon. Friend. I do not believe that the term "federal" is inappropriate. Of course, if one starts with a single central state and then federalises, one is decentralising. However, that is not the starting point in Europe. The starting point is 15 independent nation states. If the attempt is to create a supranational institution with supranational authority at the expense of national Parliaments and national Governments, one is undoubtedly moving in a federal direction and, depending on the degree of integration that is conceded, one can end up with a federal state. Those who want that objective should not be so shy about using the term that properly describes their ambitions.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The right hon. and learned Gentleman said a few moments ago that the European Union was something less than a federal state, or words to that effect. Surely it is already something more. A federal state has a separation of powers, whereas we already have a single court, a single Council, a single Commission, a single Parliament, possibly a single currency and a single central bank, and perhaps a single representation abroad on a single commercial policy. Does that not mean that, far from being federal, the EU is already centralised?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said yesterday that he wanted to know what his colleagues abroad thought. In effect, they are asking for a single institutional state that would leave no real power for a national Parliament such as ours.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is correct to say that there are supranational institutions, as he described. The crucial factor in determining whether we have yet achieved a federal system is the amount of overall power that the supranational institutions have. If one considers the totality of decisions on the use of resources, for example, or on legislation, or on matters affecting the life of individual citizens, one finds that the use of only a small fraction of the resources raised in this country is at present determined by supranational institutions. One is entitled to make that point.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North) *rose—*

Mr. Rifkind: I will give way in a few moments, but I must make progress.

I now want to focus on the issues before Heads of Government at the Dublin European Council tomorrow and on Saturday. Aside from economic and monetary union, the IGC discussion at Dublin is likely to be the most substantive. Heads of Government confirmed at their meeting in October that the IGC should end at the Amsterdam European Council next June. We strongly support that goal. The IGC must swiftly complete its work so that Europe can concentrate on the real-world challenges of the coming years, and in particular on enlargement.

The Irish presidency's report on the state of the IGC negotiation is a sensible contribution to completing the process on time. It draws together into one document options that are on the table, including all the UK options. I emphasise that the presidency report is just that: a report. It is not a draft proposal for decision. Decisions are still six months away. Nothing can be agreed until everything is agreed, and that will be by unanimity. However, the report gives a snapshot of the scope of the conference, areas of emerging consensus, and areas in which either the work is not yet much advanced or it is already clear that there are major differences of approach.

Let me start with the positive side. The paper demonstrates that the UK's ideas are gaining ground in a number of areas, including subsidiarity, the role

[Mr. Rifkind]

of national Parliaments, and practical improvements to the operation of the common foreign and security policy. The report also demonstrates that in many areas of institutional change in the European Community, the rhetoric employed by some of our partners has perhaps run ahead of the reality.

On the extension of qualified majority voting, for example, the presidency report is almost silent. It says somewhat disarmingly:

"Many Member States are at this stage reticent about showing their hands".

In these areas—and many others—good progress is being made, but the presidency report also reveals a number of areas where member states' positions remain far apart. I want to focus the rest of my remarks on some of the most important of these.

I begin with immigration, asylum and issues of free movement and frontiers. The presidency report brings into focus ambitions in some member states of which this House has been aware for many weeks and months from the IGC documents that we have regularly deposited as the negotiation has proceeded. Some partners would like to develop those issues as competences of the European Community, removing them from the scope of intergovernmental co-operation in the third pillar.

That, of course, is out of the question, and not just for the UK. The presidency report notes:

"A number of Member States have indicated that they do not accept the transfer of any matter at present dealt with"

in the intergovernmental pillar.

The third pillar, which also includes the fight against international crime and drug trafficking, covers areas of national competence. That is why it was decided at Maastricht to develop those issues within a separate pillar of the treaty.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): As the European Parliament has said clearly and specifically that it will take Britain to court over the issue of border controls in the event of our using the veto at Amsterdam, and since many of us have believed for years that the declaration of the Single European Act has no real validity in European law, what on earth would any British Government do if the European Court determined that our border controls had no legal basis?

Mr. Rifkind: The Government attach the same importance as my hon. Friend does to the absolute observance of the assurances that have been given with regard to frontiers. We believe that those assurances can be depended upon. We have not the slightest intention of conceding one inch with regard to the right of this Government and this Parliament to control frontiers. That is crucial to the United Kingdom's position.

We are keen to develop co-operation with our partners in these areas. We have put forward proposals in the IGC to improve the operation of the third pillar.

For issues as sensitive as these, however, it is a myth to suggest that Community decision-making could be effective. It would complicate and delay practical progress. The priority is to act. The decisions that I hope we can reach at Dublin on drugs and international crime are good examples of the action that we should be taking. We want Dublin to exercise real impact in these areas.

On frontiers, as I have stressed, our position could not be clearer: the United Kingdom will maintain its right to impose necessary controls. For an island—for these purposes the UK and Ireland operate as a single island within a common travel area—frontier controls are the best and least intrusive way to prevent illegal immigration. For partners with extensive and permeable land borders things might look different. They rely on identity cards, residence permits, registration with the police, and so on to maintain internal security. That is a sensible approach for them, but it is not an approach that would suit our geography or our traditions.

Our partners know that our position on this issue is unshakeable. There is an interesting acknowledgment of that on page 36 of the presidency report, where it is observed that, if the Schengen agreement was ever incorporated into the European Union, there would have to be "provision for opt-outs".

That leads naturally to the question of flexibility, which is perhaps the most far-reaching issue under discussion in the intergovernmental conference. The idea that it is perfectly healthy for some member states to integrate more closely or more quickly in certain areas, provided that all agree, was first developed by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. As the European Union enlarges, it must find better ways to accommodate the diversity of its membership. Not only is Britain a firm advocate of flexibility, but flexibility already exists in the treaty—for example, in the EMU arrangements, including Britain's EMU option, and in our social chapter opt-out.

Therefore, the discussion in the intergovernmental conference is not about whether to have flexible arrangements, but how flexibility should operate: whether it should continue to be negotiated case by case or whether there could be value in creating general mechanisms for flexibility within the treaty. There are dangers as well as potential benefits in that approach. We must avoid creating a process whereby vanguard groups establish joint practices and policies that all are expected to follow over time. We must ensure that flexibility cannot be used by others to escape the obligations of an open single market, a strong competition policy and a common commercial policy. Above all, we must ensure that, if groups in the Union want to make use of our common institutions for their own purposes, they have the agreement of all those with a stake in those institutions. If we do agree to new treaty language, the conditions must be tightly defined.

We have always believed that a common European foreign policy should respect the national interests of individual member states. A majority European foreign policy would in any case be weaker than a common policy to which all EU partners are fully committed. On the whole, the debate on the CFSP issue at the intergovernmental conference seems to be going in a welcome direction. The approach which the presidency has put forward as a basis for discussion in its draft paper retains unanimity for the adoption of joint actions and for all decisions with a security-defence dimension. It recognises that, even for other, less significant decisions, individual member states should retain a veto for stated reasons of national policy.

In their recent joint letter, Chancellor Kohl and President Chirac also argued for the retention of unanimity for European Council decisions, for Council policy decisions and for all decisions on security and defence in general. They suggest majority voting only for implementation decisions, while recognising the difficulties of definition. We have said that we are prepared to look at ideas for differentiating between policy decisions and decisions on the modalities of their implementation—although we are not at all sure that it will be possible in practice to define such a distinction.

Obviously we shall have to discuss the issue further, but the fundamental point—that member states have national interests which cannot simply be overridden by majority voting in the European Union's foreign policy—is not now in dispute.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Can my right hon. and learned Friend say a little more about the statement in "The British Approach to the IGC":

"In particular, we are ready to look at the idea of appointing a single figure to represent the foreign policy of the Union to the outside world for the CFSP"?

I find that hard to understand. That is all very well if it is for the Governor of Hong Kong, but it would be more difficult for someone else in rotation.

Mr. Rifkind: There is a fundamental difference: the Governor of Hong Kong has executive responsibilities, and the person we are considering is a spokesperson who does not make policy. We already have a common foreign policy in a number of areas—for instance, our attitude towards the middle east, Russia and many other parts of the world where the interests of the United Kingdom, France, Germany and other western European countries are broadly the same. Therefore, co-ordination between the various member states is often required in order to present that policy properly on a day-to-day basis.

We are open to the suggestion that an official—I stress that it would be an official and not someone with a political background—should be given the responsibility of acting as spokesperson for the European Union in areas where the national Governments have determined a common foreign policy. I believe that that is a sensible and practical improvement that is fully consistent with retaining the clear obligation on national Governments to determine policy.

In the area of defence and security, the Government are strongly committed to effective European cooperation. Our objective is to enable Europeans to shoulder their responsibilities in a way that reinforces, rather than weakens, NATO and the transatlantic link. The United Kingdom is determined that the intergovernmental conference should not put that prospect at risk. That is why we continue to argue that a Western European Union that is subordinated to the European Union, or which discriminates against non-EU allies, could not deliver the real defence options that Europe needs.

The presidency report to Dublin admits that there are divisions on the issue and proposes what it calls a "middle way" to resolve them. It says that the European Union should avail itself of the Western European Union, but in commentary it freely confesses that that covers two alternative approaches. We have made it clear that it would not be acceptable for the WEU to be subordinated to the European Union. It is a separate organisation, with its own treaty base and a different membership. Those facts must be respected, and it is not an area in which we should tolerate ambiguity.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Before he leaves that point, will the Foreign Secretary address the question of accountability and control over the decisions taken by Ministers of the Council on defence matters? Do the British Government believe that control will still be exercised by national Parliaments, not only in those Parliaments but through delegations to the Western European Union Assembly? Therefore, the arrangement whereby the delegations are in turn responsible to their parties in Parliament would continue.

Mr. Rifkind: I believe that defence cannot be separated from the sovereignty of an independent country. Since we joined NATO, we have been willing to have common policies regarding collective security in Europe—and both the WEU and NATO are expressions of that willingness—but we have always emphasised the ultimate sovereignty of the Crown and Parliament regarding defence matters. Therefore, I do not envisage any significant changes in the areas to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Mr. Dykes: My right hon. and learned Friend referred to the European co-ordination of foreign policy in the middle east. He has just returned from a successful visit to Israel and other countries. Will he confirm that the European Community and Union will take a much more profound interest in middle eastern matters in order to assist the peace process, notwithstanding the recent appointment of Madeleine Albright—which has caused some consternation in certain quarters—and the fact that the Americans do not seem able to do it on their own?

Mr. Rifkind: The international community must be very sensitive to the situation before it becomes involved in the complex issues of the middle east. There is a case for the western European countries and the United States working together to assist those who seek a successful outcome in the middle east peace process. However, I would have no time for any attempt by European countries to compete with the Americans in trying to influence the outcome. That would make an already incredibly difficult task even more complicated and, ultimately, would prove very divisive. Yes, the international community can help and I believe that western European countries and the United States can co-operate closely in assisting the process. That is the way in which I would take it forward.

There is a strong temptation, felt by a number of our partners and by the Labour party, to do something at the intergovernmental conference to show that Europe is active on the subject of employment. We all agree that creating jobs is one of the key challenges Europe now faces and that there is a role for Europe in creating the right conditions—for example, by completing the single market and working for further global trade liberalisation.

But what added value would there be in a new treaty chapter on employment, as suggested by several member states and supported by the Opposition? Commitments to high, or even full, employment might help the treaty drafters to feel good and compassionate, but they would

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raise expectations without delivering a single job. On the contrary, a requirement on member states to coordinate policies would risk the imposition on the United Kingdom of continental employment policies that have been manifestly less successful than our own. The Government are proud of their job creation record, and we will not put it at risk.

Like others, we have made a number of proposals in the IGC to meet particular national concerns. Following the judgment of the European Court of Justice on the working time directive, we will require treaty change to restore the position agreed at Maastricht on social policy. Others may want to concoct job-destroying social policies between themselves, but we shall not accept that they should be imposed on the United Kingdom. We have put forward proposals that would disapply the working time directive from the United Kingdom and would close off the possibility of using Community treaty articles to force social policy on the United Kingdom by the back door.

We have also made proposals to address the problem of quota hopping. The common fisheries policy established a system of national quotas to provide a secure benefit to national fishing communities. Quota hopping undermines that. A satisfactory solution in those two areas will be an indispensable part of any IGC outcome, from the United Kingdom point of view.

Mr. Gill: Does my right hon. and learned Friend appreciate that the question of quota hopping will exist only up to 2002? After 2002, when derogations concerning fishing disappear, the policy will be one of equal access to a common resource, and therefore the question of dealing with quota hoppers is purely a short-term palliative.

Mr. Rifkind: I appreciate that changes could take place in 2002. It will be for the European Union to negotiate whether alternative arrangements are appropriate, or whether they wish to confirm 2002 for the changes to which my hon. Friend refers.

There is much to be done if the IGC is to conclude by next June, but the work has been well launched, and we will continue to make a constructive contribution based on the approach set out in our IGC White Paper earlier this year: of a Union that develops as a partnership of nations, co-operating together in areas where action at a European level is needed, but proud of our cultural and political diversity and conscious of the limits of integration.

The role of the British Government in any European negotiation is to protect and to advance the British national interest. That is something that Conservatives have consistently done over the past 17 years. That approach has achieved significant benefits for the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's support for independent democracies co-operating where we see cause. Does that not mean that we must say no to a European Court which regularly overrides Acts of Parliament, because an Act of Parliament is the ultimate expression of British democracy?

Mr. Rifkind: When we joined the European Union, Parliament said that it would accept the jurisdiction of the European Court in so far as the European Court interprets the treaty that provides for our membership. Therefore, the legal position is quite clear. If the European Court of Justice has before it matters of interpreting the treaty of Rome, which we signed and of which Parliament approved, it is able to indicate whether a member state is in breach of the treaty.

There are various ways in which the European Court has performed in recent years of which we strongly disapprove. As my right hon. Friend knows, we made a series of proposals to alter the way in which it functions, and I am pleased to say that the French Government have shown support for some of those proposals. Other Governments have also said that they are positively interested in looking at some of the ideas.

Mr. Alain Juppé, the French Prime Minister, made a powerful speech in Paris, in which he warned that the European Court was developing certain federal tendencies, and said that it was legitimate for that matter to be considered within the IGC. We welcome the fact that the French Prime Minister has acted in that way.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for giving way and for acknowledging the federal character of European Community law. If we allow the European Community to take from us the right to mint our own coinage, so that a single currency becomes irrevocable and is imposed on this country by the decision of one Parliament—a decision that appears to be binding on its successors—have we not then crossed the threshold from being an independent sovereign state to being part of a federal Europe?

Mr. Rifkind: The European Union cannot take that right from us. What is possible, of course, is that this Parliament and the people of the United Kingdom, through a referendum, might one day provide the authority for such a change, but it is not something that can be taken from this country unless this country were expressly to give its consent. I think that that point has been fully clarified.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Will the Foreign Secretary clarify further the point raised by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) about the European Court? I am sure that the Foreign Secretary would not want to raise his right hon. Friend's hopes unnecessarily. Given the limited, and rather sensible, reforms that the Government propose to the ECJ, will the Foreign Secretary confirm that there is no question whatever of the British Government failing to send people from this country to the European Court to be active participants in its work and decision making? His right hon. Friend should not be left with the illusion that somehow we are about to disengage.

Mr. Rifkind: It is of great importance to have people of the highest legal calibre serving in the European Court of Justice. The present British judge, David Edward, is of a very high calibre indeed and serves this country extremely well. It is worth remembering that we have, as a country, won more cases in the European Court of Justice than we have lost, but that is not to say that we are not entitled to make criticism of the ways in which it sometimes performs. Where it acts in a way that we

believe is over-political, or that is contrary to the interests of the United Kingdom, we shall draw attention to that point.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Rifkind: I shall give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel).

Mr. Jessel: My right hon. and learned Friend used the words "over-political". Does that not mean that the European Court is not an ordinary traditional court of justice merely trying to act fairly and justly between litigants within the law as the United Kingdom knows it, but that it has a somewhat different agenda in that its terms of reference require it to advance the cause of European union? It is not, in that sense, a pure court of justice: it makes up the law as it goes along, and it goes beyond what is acceptable to people in this country.

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is certainly correct that in one crucial respect the European Court of Justice is unique: it does not, as an international court, simply determine the rights between Governments or states, but can intervene directly and create rights for individual citizens of member states. We cannot hide from the fact that the UK Parliament agreed to give it that power. When we joined the European Union, it was an existing power that the European Court of Justice had. It is not a power that has been imposed more recently.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Rifkind: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), but then I must make progress.

Mr. Cash: There was, of course, the European Communities Act 1972, but does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that since then we have been giving way more and more powers by successive treaties? The real point that we must address is that the European Court of Justice adjudicates over those functions, and the only way in which we can resolve that is by repatriating the powers that have been given away, which would deal with the very point causing so much concern—the political nature of the European Court of Justice. Repatriation—yes.

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend grossly over-simplifies the situation, because he does not take into account the fact that if we—as a Government and a country—believe in the single market, it is necessary for that single market to be enforced, and that requires the European Court of Justice and the Commission to continue with many of the powers that they currently have.

Mr. Dykes: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Rifkind: No, I must make progress.

I have been referring to the achievements that have been realised over the past 17 years. In some areas, we have led the debate within the European Union; in others, where there was a specific British interest at stake, we stood out alone to protect that interest. The budget rebate, the social chapter opt-out, our opt-out of the Schengen agreement and our opt-out of the single currency give us the choice when the time comes to decide.

The Government believe in European co-operation, but not in ideologically motivated integration, which is the preserve of the European purist. Opposition Front Benchers have become instinctive integrationists. The whole purpose of the Leader of the Opposition's excursions abroad has been to reassure their socialist partners in Europe that a Labour Government would be more willing to deepen integration in a manner that we believe to be fundamentally against the British national interest. It is not just that the Leader of the Opposition talks about "never being isolated" in Europe. That phrase in itself is a massive hostage to fortune in the context of the hard, tough negotiations ahead. The Labour approach is as naive as it is potentially damaging to our interests.

There is a real fault line between ourselves and the Opposition on European policy. For their part, the presumption is for integration. For the Conservative party, the presumption is against integration unless we can be convinced that the national interest is served and that the benefits of greater integration would be sufficient for our quality of life and for employment that it would justify the loss of some national decision making.

Within weeks of the final possible date for a general election, the intergovernmental conference will conclude at Amsterdam. *[Interruption.]* The electorate will have to decide who they believe will better stand up for British interests at Amsterdam.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am tired of the running commentary coming from hon. Members on the Benches further from me. I should be grateful if they would keep quiet.

Mr. Rifkind: The differences between the two Front Benches and between the two parties are substantive and very real in the context of decisions at Amsterdam.

What weakens the United Kingdom's position in Europe is the possibility of an alternative Government who is committed to giving up many things from which we have fought hard to protect this country. We are guided by the national interest: the Opposition seem to be guided by what others in Europe want.

Labour has proposed to extend qualified majority voting to four new important areas of policy: social, industrial, environmental and regional. It is an extraordinary negotiating position to offer up major concessions to integration before the real work of the intergovernmental conference has even begun. It also displays a Labour naivety that has not been matched by European Governments.

Each member state was asked by the presidency to put forward ideas on where qualified majority voting should be extended, but only two countries out of 15 put forward specific proposals. Thus, in the game of poker that the Prime Minister talked about on Sunday in his television interview, Labour has already shown its hand. Its inexperience and folly are unmatched in Europe.

[Mr. Rifkind]

Labour would give up our opt-out on the social chapter. Despite Labour's attempts to reassure business, we all know that that would be a blank cheque to open up new routes to social regulation and integration, which would profoundly damage Britain's competitiveness and job prospects. It is truly a job-destroying chapter. How ludicrous it would be to sign away our competitive advantage at a time when unemployment is 7 per cent. and falling in the United Kingdom, and 10 per cent. or more and continuing to rise elsewhere in the European Union. There is a fundamental philosophical and political divide between us and the Opposition, in that they actively want to conform to a European social model that is shown, day by day, to be well past its sell-by date and damaging to Europe.

Similarly, Labour has fallen head over heels for writing an employment chapter into the treaty. It is no use the Labour party saying, "That would mean nothing, so don't worry because it's only warm words." That is dangerous enough in itself. Why raise people's expectations that the European Union has some magical wand to cure Europe's unemployment ills, when the policies currently being pursued under the social chapter are creating the opposite effect?

However innocuous the words, we are long enough in the tooth and wise enough to the realities of life to know that by proposing Community competence we would deprive Britain once again of taking decisions on what is a matter for this House and this Parliament. Not only would an employment chapter not create a single job: it has the potential to destroy many of them.

Labour want all legislation currently decided on by qualified majority in the Council of Ministers to be subject to a simplified form of co-decision in the European Parliament. Every increase in the powers of the European Parliament reduces, by definition, the powers of this Parliament. That would not enhance democratic accountability: it would merely centralise more powers, taking them out of the hands of the elected representatives of this House. It would be another step on the slippery slope which says that European centralisation should become the natural order of things.

An intriguing, growing divide is emerging between the Leader of the Opposition, his shadow Chancellor and his shadow Foreign Secretary. The Leader of the Opposition said boldly that he would

"never allow this country to be isolated".

Yesterday, *The Times* reported the shadow Chancellor as saying:

"We are not afraid of isolation in Europe".

Who are we to believe? Is the Leader of the Opposition isolated in his shadow Cabinet, even if not in Europe? Or does the soi-disant "Iron Chancellor" speak for Labour? We need to know.

Then again, the redoubtable shadow Chancellor rebukes the Prime Minister for daring to suggest that Labour would give up the veto. He protested on the "Today" programme:

"It has got to be made absolutely clear that"

any question of giving up the veto

"is a myth that is perpetuated by the Conservative Party."

Well, if it is a myth, it is not being created by the Conservatives. It is a myth being spread in a most sinister fashion by the shadow Foreign Secretary.

Following the shadow Chancellor's protest, the shadow Foreign Secretary declared:

"If you want reform, frankly in many cases you do have to have majority voting".

He confirmed that Labour would end the veto on social, regional, environmental and industrial policy. He stated quite boldly:

"There will have to be some majority votes against those individual nations that stand in the way".

What if those individual nations included Britain? On that, there was a resounding silence.

The shadow Foreign Secretary and the shadow Chancellor should reconcile their differences. Perhaps we need a conciliation service. Alternatively, we could return to the device used during Harold Wilson's referendum on Europe, when Labour Cabinet Ministers were licensed to attack each other throughout the length and breadth of the country.

Yet another damning admission by Labour was its declaration that it rejected permanent opt-outs. That has alarming implications. It has revealed to every other European Government that the British budget rebate, the Schengen opt-out to protect our frontiers and the Maastricht single currency opt-out are just temporary aberrations to be abandoned by a Labour Government in due course.

The Opposition, through their inexperience and naivety, have become a menace to Britain. They are weakening Britain's position in these crucial negotiations by encouraging other Governments to wait until after our general election in the hope that some of their crucial negotiating objectives will then fall into their laps. They are a menace, and they need to be resisted. They need to get their act together and remember the national interest. It is the national interest that will be our guiding principle in the weeks and months ahead.

5.36 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): The European summit provides an opportunity for the nations of Europe to comment on the major issues facing Europe. Before I turn to the sore points that inflame passion in this Chamber, I shall address one of those major issues.

Hon. Members who were present six months ago, when we last debated European matters before a summit, will recall that I began by referring to events in the former Yugoslavia. Those events will be one of the international issues considered by the European summit in Dublin. They should be before that summit because of the current crisis of democratic rights in Serbia.

In the past month, President Milosevic has fallen down in three ways on his claim that Serbia aspires to being a European nation. Free elections were annulled because they were won by his opponents. The supreme court has been exposed as a puppet that rubber-stamps his decisions. The independent media have been suppressed because they suppressed his defence of the annulment of those elections.

I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will condemn those actions by President Milosevic. Far from making progress towards democracy, Serbia is sliding back into

totalitarianism. If the European Union's aspirations for a common foreign and security policy mean anything, the European summit in Dublin must make a robust statement condemning those actions.

At Dayton, Milosevic gave an undertaking that he would observe democratic principles and human rights. In return, he received assurances of benefits, including trade with the European Union. This weekend he must be firmly told that the benefits of the Dayton process will come to him only if he fulfils the undertakings that he made. In his reply, will the Minister say what statement the United Kingdom would support in condemning those events in Serbia?

I have spoken for only two minutes, but that is quite long enough in bipartisan mode. Let us get down to the more enjoyable matters on which we disagree. I have to say to the Foreign Secretary that the fault line in the Chamber does not run along the table between us: it runs along the Bench behind him and his own Back Benches.

I was in wide agreement with an awful lot of what the Foreign Secretary said, until he pulled out the purple passage of his speech in which he rode off into the sunset. I particularly applaud his robust defence of why Britain's place is in Europe. I even found myself cheering him on when he batted down the Euro-sceptics on his own Back Benches. I certainly do not wish to undermine his courageous attempt to keep his party just about in touch with European reality. Therefore, rather than undermine him by agreeing with him, I felt that it might be helpful to his position in his party if I were to denounce him.

Let me begin by measuring the Foreign Secretary's policies in regard to the forthcoming summit against his performance at the last summit. Those of us who are addicted to these six-monthly debates will recall that the last speech that the Foreign Secretary made before a European summit was made before the Florence summit. The great majority of that speech was about BSE and beef. I think that my hon. Friends will have noticed that today we heard not a single word about BSE or beef. The Foreign Secretary may wish to forget about it, but, before we are swept into matters connected with the forthcoming summit, an interim assessment of how much was really achieved at Florence might be appropriate. The Prime Minister did, after all, claim that it was a triumph, and I think that the Foreign Secretary described it as a turning point.

In his statement to the House after Florence, the Prime Minister told us that by October two stages in the lifting of the beef ban would be completed, and that by November all five would be completed. I think that I carry hon. Members on both sides of the House with me when I say that it is now December: October and November have both passed. No stages in the lifting of the beef ban have been completed, to growing anger in the farming community. I understand that the good farmers of Cornwall have just petitioned the Dean of Truro to have a gargoyle of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food added to Truro cathedral as a lasting monument to his contribution to the BSE crisis.

The Foreign Secretary was unable to join us when we debated what happened to the Florence agreement a month ago, but someone has to explain what went wrong after Florence. There is some explaining to do. In last month's debate, the Minister of Agriculture told us that the ban had remained in place because of opposition from European Governments who were "facing strong internal pressures". I remember our debate six months ago, before the Florence summit, and I remember the Foreign Secretary telling the House that any step towards lifting the ban

"does not need to go before any Ministers or any Government."—[*Official Report*, 20 June 1996; Vol. 279, c. 1028.]

That was the agreement that he struck for Florence. How, then, can it be that we cannot get the ban lifted because of opposition from member Governments?

I do not believe for a moment that the Foreign Secretary would knowingly mislead the House. Did he therefore misunderstand the deal that he was about to sign at the Florence summit? If so, why should we feel any more confident about what he tells us that he will achieve at Dublin?

There is a wider lesson here, to inform our approach to the next summit. I know that the Conservatives like to believe that they can use Europe to demonstrate what strong men they are, but Florence demonstrated the reality—how poor they are at doing business with Europe. Standing on the sidelines, shouting through a megaphone about how much you disagree with everyone else, is not a posture of strength; on the contrary, it exposes how weak your bargaining position actually is. Yet, in truth, that is the way in which the Conservatives intend to approach tomorrow's summit.

The Foreign Secretary will go to Dublin as another incarnation of the "abominable no-man". He will go to object to a long list of measures that are before the intergovernmental conference. As he told the House, he will object to measures intended to simplify the procedures of the European Parliament—

Mr. Redwood: Will the right hon. Gentleman explain how he would get the beef ban lifted next week, if he is not in favour of what the Government have been doing?

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman is well aware that we debated the matter a month ago. From the Dispatch Box, I recounted the way in which the Labour party would have behaved differently in relation to the BSE crisis over an entire decade—starting back in 1980, when we would not have abandoned the regulations that we left in place and which the Conservative party threw out of the window.

I was about to deal with the objections that the Foreign Secretary will raise in Dublin. One concerns measures designed to simplify procedures in the European Parliament. I must tell the Foreign Secretary that I have tried very hard to understand those procedures. There are six different ways in which the European Parliament passes legislation, and I have never yet managed to understand the distinction between them—and I am fairly confident that, if I cannot understand them, few of my constituents have a clear grasp of them.

If we wish to have a functioning democracy, its procedures must be transparent and understandable. That is why I believe that it would be right to widen the role of co-decision in the European Parliament, and in directives. I have never understood the logic of Conservative Members who complain about what they see as damaging legislation from Brussels, but then object to the European Parliament's having more powers to scrutinise such legislation. Such powers would not be at

[Mr. Cook]

the expense of our Parliament; they would give it greater power of scrutiny over Brussels—not the right to initiate more legislation, but another hurdle before the passing of legislation.

Mr. Rifkind: The right hon. Gentleman does not understand what he is saying. A power of co-decision is exactly that: it means that, instead of the Council of Ministers' having the sole right to determine legislation—Ministers who are answerable to their own Parliaments and their own electorates—the European Parliament's approval would also be required. If the right hon. Gentleman, in advocating more co-decision, is not even aware of what he is recommending, he really ought to do a little more homework.

Mr. Cook: The Foreign Secretary knows perfectly well that the only proposals for co-decision making are in cases in which the Council of Ministers acts by majority voting. If Conservative Members are constantly worried about Britain's being overruled in majority voting, why do they resist a second hurdle for the European Parliament—where Britain has more representation than it has in the Council of Europe in terms of the weighting of votes—in order to test legislation? I know that Conservative Members have immense difficulty in getting representatives of their party elected to the European Parliament, but that is not an excuse for stopping those who are elected to that Parliament to represent Britain doing a proper job.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): We have often heard references to the so-called democratic deficit in Europe, but surely this is not a simple matter of saying that what is passed by a majority in the European Parliament is legitimate just because a majority is there. Surely the fundamental distinction is that the "cracy" element of the word "democracy" implies the state, but the word "demos" implies a people. The truth is that there is no European people, in the sense that we would accept the legitimacy of majority decision making by a European Parliament.

Mr. Cook: No one is asking my right hon. Friend or anyone else to accept a decision simply on the basis of a majority in the European Parliament. What co-decision making would require is that any directive would have first to gain a majority in the Council of Ministers, and then to gain a majority in the European Parliament. If hon. Members wish to reduce the number of directives coming from Europe, the best way of doing so is to ensure that a double rather than a single majority is required.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): Will the British people's wish for more powers in the European Parliament be measured by the turnout in today's by-election for that Parliament?

Mr. Cook: I am confident that that by-election will measure the British people's instinct in favour of a Labour representative in Strasbourg. I do not think that it will show the least scintilla of support for those Conservatives who wish to resist either the proper functions of the European Parliament or the advance of a Labour Government. I shall be extraordinarily surprised if any of the votes cast in Merseyside West give any comfort to those who come to the Chamber tonight to argue in favour of a different position on Europe.

The Foreign Secretary will go to Dublin, we understand, to object to powers relating to consumer protection. I gather that the one aspect of the European Union that Conservative Members support is the single market; yet, if we are to have a single market throughout Europe, what will be more important to the interests of the British people than ensuring high standards of consumer protection throughout that single market?

The Foreign Secretary will go to object to a new requirement in the treaty for non-discrimination against people with disabilities. He does not speak for anyone else in Britain on that. Hon. Members who have met members of organisations representing disabled people will know that every such organisation in Britain is in favour of a requirement that would oblige the Commission to have regard to the needs of disabled people when framing directives.

As he told the House, the Foreign Secretary will also go to object to an employment chapter. The employment chapter that will be proposed at Dublin is a modest, reasonable attempt to respond to what is certainly not a modest social problem—mass unemployment across Europe. It provides procedures by which other European Union policies can be assessed for their impact on employment. In fact, all it does is write into the treaty of the European Union the agreements on employment creation that, we understood, the Government agreed at the Essen summit, but now do not want turned into a treaty amendment.

As a result of the Maastricht treaty, the treaty of the European Union now contains precise targets on Government borrowing, national debt, interest rates and inflation. Why should not those demanding financial targets be balanced by a commitment to high employment? Why should we not take the measure to ensure that those monetary targets are not pursued at the expense of jobs?

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Cook: I will give way to the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash), without whom a debate on Europe would be like "Hamlet" without the first grave-digger.

Mr. Cash: First, has not the right hon. Gentleman noticed that article 2 of the treaty already contains a commitment to employment, so why is he now trying to amplify what is already there? Secondly, has he not noticed that the social chapter has led German companies to flee Germany in their droves and relocate here? They are aware that the policies that are being pursued by him and his crowd behind him are creating unemployment on a massive scale, which is leading to riots and disorder in France and to a critical position in Germany? He should be thinking far more about the effect of his policies on the working people of this country.

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman lives in pure fantasy land if he imagines that the strikes in France are directed against the social chapter. If he really wants to reflect on the relative flow of investment, I suggest that he should

consider two pieces of news. The first is the interesting statement by the head of BMW that its decision to make a major £500 million investment in Britain had absolutely nothing to do with the social chapter, and that Britain would eventually join the standards of the social chapter.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman should consider the flow of investment. If he does, he will find that, since the social chapter was implemented on the continent, there has been record investment by British businesses in the European nations that have signed the social chapter. If he wants to preen himself on the relative employment record of his Government, he could call on Ministers to publish the report that it is delaying and that was prepared by the Training and Enterprise Councils Secretariat, which says:

"Between 1980 and 1994"—

I think that those years coincide with the Government's stewardship of our nation's economy—

"civilian employment grew by 1.7 per cent. in France, 5.2 per cent. in West Germany—but less than 0.1 per cent. in the UK."

That is the truth of the comparison between the nations of Europe.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: I will give way, but then I must move on to another matter.

Mr. Leigh: May I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the convergence criteria? He will find in the documents provided to us by the Library that, in relation to general Government gross debt as a percentage of gross domestic product, only three out of the 15 nations pass: the percentage in Belgium is 130 per cent, for instance, and that in Italy is 123 per cent. In relation to general Government deficit as a percentage of GDP, only four pass. If it became clear in the next few months that most nations were not going to meet those criteria by any means, and if grotesque fudging and fiddling were going on, would a Labour Government—if there were one—rule out joining a single currency on those grounds?

Mr. Cook: We have repeatedly made it clear that we shall not join a single currency if there is grotesque fudging of the criteria anywhere. Those decisions can be taken only at the end of next year when we see the figures for next year, but if there is grotesque fudging, that plainly will not stand up to what we have promised the British people in our draft manifesto, which is a hard-headed assessment of the economic criteria for membership.

Finally on the issues that the Foreign Secretary goes to Dublin to object to, he goes famously to object to any extension of qualified majority voting—at any rate, that is what he says. I do not know whether my hon. Friends noticed the Prime Minister saying on Sunday that there might be something "hiding in the undergrowth" where QMV might be "worth while". I warn Conservative Members below the Gangway that, in that phrase, I detect the sound of the start of an equivocation.

The Minister of State, who is shaking his head, has thoroughly beaten about the bushes of the intergovernmental conference. There could be nothing hidden in the undergrowth on which he had not yet stubbed his toe. Does he know what the Prime Minister might have been talking about as a worthwhile extension of QMV? May I possibly help him and the Foreign Secretary in mentioning exactly one such worthwhile area, of which the Prime Minister might have been thinking?

The Danish Government have tabled a new proposal on fraud—

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Frog?

Mr. Cook: No, fraud. It would be distinctly anti-European to table a proposal on frog. I was about to say that fraud is a massive blot on the European Union's record, but, in view of that intervention, perhaps I should rephrase my sentence.

The European Union loses 1 billion ecu a year on fraud, half of it through the wasteful common agricultural policy. The Danish Government have tabled proposals to tighten up on fraud. New article 209 in the treaty offers tougher steps and sanctions against member states that fail to take those tougher steps.

Those new measures would of course work on QMV. They must do so because if everyone has a veto no one would ever suffer a sanction. What are the Government going to do when they are faced with that proposal? Are they really going to fight for the right of Italy to veto sanctions against countries that are soft on fraud? Do they really think that they will be taken seriously in Europe if they dogmatically object to any extension of majority voting, even when, as in this case, it would be in Britain's interests?

Of course our partners may ask why they should take seriously the Conservative Government's negotiating position at the IGC when the Government have already said that, whatever the outcome, they will veto the lot at the next summit out of pique at having to accept the 48-hour directive. We know the Government's position on that. They do not accept that excessive working hours have any effect on health and safety. They have gone to extraordinary lengths to maintain that position. In April the Department of Health reprinted an entire leaflet entitled "Mental Health and Stress in the Workplace". The original, unpublished report contained the sentence:

"Research has shown that working more than 48 hours per week doubles the risk of coronary heart disease".

The eventual published report had that sentence removed.

Sir Patrick Cormack: What about Members of Parliament?

Mr. Cook: Of course, our work is a pure delight.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): If that report is accurate, is it not extraordinary that the right hon. Gentleman is not addressing an empty Chamber?

Mr. Cook: It is not a frivolous matter. The House of Commons has quite a record of coronary heart disease—so much so that, in 1978, when we were sitting longer hours than we do now, we specifically commissioned a study that documented that high incidence of coronary heart disease. This is not a laughing matter, but the point that the hon. Gentleman must answer is: if he is so robust in defending that proposition, why did the Department of Health go to the length of spending £1,500 on printing 5,000 such leaflets and then a further sum of public

[Mr. Cook]

money on pulping every one of them to get rid of that single sentence? I will tell him why. It was because the Department and the Government do not want the public to know what they know—that excessive working hours are a health and safety matter.

Thanks to the changes in the labour laws under the Government, Britain has more people working more than 48 hours than the rest of Europe put together. Since the last general election, 500,000 more people in Britain are working more than 48 hours. Conservative Members keep telling us that they support "sovereignty". Real sovereignty is about giving people control over their own lives and the right to say no to excessive hours.

The fact is that 78 per cent. of the public agree with the proposition that people should not be forced to work more than 40 hours if they do not wish to do so, and 90 per cent. agree that there should as an entitlement be a minimum of three weeks' paid holiday. I cannot believe that Conservative Members would be so foolish as to fight the next general election insisting on longer hours and shorter paid holidays—although I go down on my knees every night and pray that they will.

Sir Timothy Sainsbury (Hove): Did the right hon. Gentleman's survey of public opinion cover the percentage of the British people who wish Brussels to have the right to legislate against British laws on any health or social matter or on any matter affecting the workplace?

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman exemplifies the problem in the Tory party on this debate. It is not Brussels legislating on that matter, it is the Council of Ministers—in which the Government have played a full part. Ministers have subsequently come to the Dispatch Box to take pride in the fact that all their amendments to the directive were passed. In resisting the final outcome, the Government are representing not the wishes of the British people but the prejudices of Tory backwoodsmen.

The Government do not even represent the views of British personnel directors, one of whom recently wrote a letter to *The Times* stating that his company had used the directive as a framework for working practices, and that, consequently, it had improved output, achieved greater flexibility and reduced costs.

In all our history, the economic security and diplomatic future of Britain has never been more bound up in Europe, yet we are saddled with a Government whose Back Benchers seem to live in daily hope of more fog in the channel, cutting off the continent.

When commentators come to write about this Government's decline and fall, they will identify the Chancellor's speech yesterday to the House as the moment of truth. There was a revealing moment in his speech, when he mentioned the fact that 70 per cent. of the public support the Government's line on a single currency, and that comment was greeted with loud jeering on the Conservative Benches. How can any Government survive when their own Back Benchers think laughable the idea that the public support the Government line?

Sir Patrick Cormack: I seem to remember that, many years ago, when I was strongly in favour of Europe, the right hon. Gentleman took rather a different line. When was he converted to this passionate advocacy of the European cause?

Mr. Cook: I shall happily answer the hon. Gentleman: in 1984, when I was the Labour party's spokesman on Europe. I changed my position because, by then, we had had more than 10 years' membership of the European Union. We have now been a member for well over 20 years. I do not believe that there can be a future for Britain remaining as a member of a union that plays an increasingly larger role in our trade, our jobs and our economic future while we are constantly and simultaneously sulking, as if we wish that we were not a member. That provides us with the worst of all possible worlds.

In his speech yesterday, the Chancellor was jeered by his own side. It is no wonder that he has observed:

"There are sometimes parties that are simply not capable of being led."

In case anyone was in any about which party he was talking about, up popped the hon. Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner), who greeted Sunday's appeal for order by the Prime Minister with the characteristically generous response: "The strife goes on." That calls to mind the slogan of the Militant Tendency:

"Today the struggle, tomorrow the revolution."

Only one year from now, Britain will hold the presidency of the European Union. How will a Conservative party that is constantly wishing to pick fights with Europe—with all the enthusiasm and venom with which they pick fights among themselves—possibly pose as the president of an institution that ever more of its members regard with fear and loathing? The Euro-sceptics would be as embarrassed as the rest us to find that they were the president of Europe. Their entire approach to Europe is to block agreements, to seek confrontation and to go out on a limb. If one is president of the European Union, one must try to achieve agreement, build consensus and find the pivotal point in a debate. Having to fulfil that role in Europe would appal Conservative Members.

I offer them comfort, because we intend to relieve them of that embarrassment. Before the next debate on a European summit, there will be a general election. Something will have gone sadly wrong with our constitution if that does not turn out to be true. I am aware that there is a widespread delusion among Conservative Members that they can escape the fate that awaits them in that election if they fight it not as the party standing against the Labour party but as the party standing against Europe, and that, if they spend the campaign talking solely about Europe, the electorate will forget that they are paying higher taxes for worse public services.

Perhaps I should leave them labouring under that delusion, but I want a fair fight at the general election. I want to tell them that they really should look at the opinion polls, which, for a year, have consistently shown that Labour has a 19-point lead in answer to the question:

"Which party better represents your views on Europe?"

The reason for that belief is that people want a Government who will do business with Europe and who will get a constructive deal for Britain out of Europe. They know that the Conservative Government have amply

proved that they cannot do business in Europe, and that the Conservative party no longer even wants to cut a deal in Europe.

The Government's record on Europe of confrontation, failure and isolation will not provide the lifebelt that so many Tory Members imagine. It will be another deadweight, dragging them down in public opinion. When the electorate have the opportunity to express their verdict, the Conservatives' record on Europe will be another reason why they will conclude that the Conservative party cannot provide a competent Government for Britain and is not fit to represent Britain in Europe.

6.5 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): It is always a pleasure to participate in a great debate with the shadow Foreign Secretary, whom I have never followed previously in a debate. One of the best things in life is surprises, and one of the pleasures of listening to the shadow Foreign Secretary is that one never knows quite what he will say, which is rather a change from many of my other colleagues in the House.

By chance, my family have been afforded a series of leper's squints at European evolution. My great-grandfather was chaplain to "Dear Vicky"—Queen Victoria's eldest daughter—who was married to Crown Prince Friedrich of Prussia. Family legend has it that, as his tour of duty came towards an end, she told my great grandfather that the Crown Prince and she were exercised about their son, Wilhelm, felt that he stood in need of a strong dose of English liberalism, and asked my great-grandfather if he would stay on to be his tutor.

My great-grandfather was determined, however, to return to London and declined the offer. But because the Almighty's powers include a sense of irony, my great-grandfather lived until 1916, and, in his declining years, he had to wonder whether the entire course of European history might have been different had the Kaiser passed through his hands. His brother-in-law—who was also the Liberal Member of Parliament for Wakefield, until he decided that he preferred Mr. Disraeli to Mr. Gladstone—was invited by the Hapsburgs, via the Bank of England, to save a bank in Vienna.

In my own—more modest—way, I was *Financial Times* correspondent in Switzerland, both when, in 1961, the Germans and the Dutch revalued upwards, and when my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) and the late Reginald Maudling broke the news to the European Free Trade Association that we would seek entry to the European Community. A decade later, when that ambition was consummated, I was living in Brussels. In a manner that echoed the Duchess of Richmond's ball before Waterloo, the Anglo-Belgian chamber of commerce, coincidentally, dined in tails the night before the European Communities Act 1972 passed the House by eight votes. In the 1980s, I served longer on the Community's Budget Council than any British Minister has done, continuously, since 1972.

Although Sicily was responsible for the only good joke about the single European market, no kinsman of mine, or myself, was present at Messina in 1955. That episode has a precise relation to this debate. In 1954, in an act that would reverse centuries of British policy, we committed four divisions to the continent, until 1998, as a powerful gesture to help lubricate the passage of the Brussels treaty.

The inability of Mendes-France to get the Brussels treaty through the French Assembly rendered that gesture nugatory, but it also affected our attitude at Messina the following year. When Spaak, who was, I think, in the chair, made it clear that only those who were serious about European development should remain at the table, we British—affected by our experience the year before and believing that further investment in the project would likewise be nugatory—chose to leave the table, thus condemning ourselves two decades later to a common agricultural policy over whose conception we had had no influence.

Not only do I have no difficulty in supporting the Government's policy over the single currency, I would find any alternative to the wait and see policy an offence against a central tenet of Conservative philosophy—that we should learn from the past. There was one further lesson from Messina. The Dutch, our principal allies among the original six nations that signed the treaty of Rome, sought to delay the treaty and their participation in it to bring us back on board. It was Suez that convinced the Dutch that the era of individual European nations enjoying true independence of action was over. That caused them to sign the treaty and, a fortiori, has a resonance today.

I have spoken of the past. I am more hesitant about speaking of the future. That hesitancy is born of that episode in the life of Anthony Eden's somewhat irascible father, who came down to breakfast one morning when it was sheeting with rain outside, tapped the barometer which was set at very fair and threw it through the french windows with the words, "Go out and see for your something self." My hesitation about the future is shared by many in the Union.

I have ventilated before in the House, in a European context, the metaphor of a cathedral. Cathedrals take varying times to build. Prague took 1,000 years: Durham took 40. Par for the course might be a century. We have so far had 38, with eight years in preparation. Within the century, as with cathedrals, building will sometimes go quickly, sometimes tardily. What is critical, as with cathedrals, is that the foundations are secure, and that includes the consent of the peoples of Europe. The problem, as with most cathedrals that take longer than Durham's 40 years, is that the ordinary people of Europe have never been given a clear and constant blueprint of what the eventual building is intended to look like. Philosophically, that should not concern a nation as pragmatic as the British, but changes of gear among our colleagues can alarm us, as the past few years have demonstrated.

We should be true to ourselves and recover our national self-confidence, as our current economic performance would justify. We are demonstrating—in a way, incidentally, that a Labour Government would jeopardise—that the welfare policies in the rest of the Union are inconsistent with global competition. If we believe in ourselves, we should be confident that our colleagues will be obliged to modify their policies to meet global competition, but we would be truer to ourselves, and incidentally to the interests of the cathedral, if—in Pitt's phrase at Guildhall in my constituency—we save Europe by our example. That line of argument carries over into the single currency. Of course I acknowledge, though the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown)

[Mr. Peter Brooke]

appeared not to do so on the "Today" programme earlier this week or in the House yesterday, that there is a major political dimension to that decision.

I have my own views on the decision that we shall eventually take, but at this juncture we need to shape our minds on the economic implications. In the City of London, which I have the privilege to represent, those implications are argued both ways. The Governor of the Bank of England has indicated the ability of the City to continue to prosper outside the single currency. For myself, the City's success, not just in the contemporary era but over the centuries, has lain in the way that it has capitalised on freedom and flexibility and the willingness to offer a price on any risk.

Thus the City's future depends on a continuation of that freedom and flexibility. The present continental instincts—which are misguided in other respects, as I have suggested—militate against freedom and flexibility. It is likely that our example will be needed in that regard too, which is an added reason for remaining in the negotiations.

The way in which global competition is increasing London's role is profoundly encouraging. When I lived in Brussels, a disproportionate number of multinational companies had set up their European headquarters there. My college at Oxford sent one in six of its graduates to India between 1878 and 1914. I felt in Brussels a quarter of century ago that the late 20th century equivalent of the empire, as an international destination for Britons, was the multinational company. Despite the reputation of perfidious Albion, we are trusted as individuals internationally, and our maritime past gives us a flexibility that is the hallmark I mentioned of the City's success. The shadow Foreign Secretary's speech reminded me of when I was on the Budget Council and we held the presidency of the Community. A German Social Democratic economic spokesman confided to me that he would be happy if the British held the presidency on a permanent basis.

As the world shrinks and the Japanese philosophy of treating the whole world as their economic oyster gains ground, we are seeing an increasing number of foreign companies, in finance as well as in industries as diverse as contracting and pharmaceuticals, putting not just their European headquarters but their world headquarters in London. A profound benefit to the building of the European cathedral will occur as European companies report back from the City that our emphasis on freedom and flexibility is superior to the continental preference. That freedom and flexibility is the more important because, in so many existing financial markets, electronics has taken over from human judgment, which makes those markets potentially much more mobile.

As a believer in the cathedral, not least for future generations, I hope that we shall not need at any stage to dismantle and rebuild. Our best contribution must be to remain true to ourselves and offer our experience and our current economic success as an example and a guide. Otherwise, we will run the risk of finding ourselves at what anyone who has ever sung "Abide with me" in French will recall is le dernier rendezvous.

6.15 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) referred to the pragmatism of the British, but that pragmatism seems to have deserted the Conservatives. We saw yesterday, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) referred to it today, the barracking of the Chancellor of the Exchequer—something I never expected to see.

It was astonishing because, in my political life, I was brought up to believe that the secret weapon of the Tories was loyalty. I now see that their loyalty was based on the absence of dogma. They subordinated all principles to that of retaining power and it was when they violated that approach, such as at the time of the corn laws, that they became divided and lost their power and influence. That is Margaret Thatcher's legacy. She gave dogma to the Conservative party, and the squabbling and the antagonisms are the inheritance that she has bequeathed to them. Following the Labour party's divisions over dogma 15 years ago, we now see the Tory version, which is likely to be fierce and long-lasting.

I am a pro-European, although I have certain reservations on economic and monetary union. I voted for entry into the Community against a three-line Whip, and I have never seen any reason to regret it. In this debate, we have heard from a number of Euro-sceptics. Engel, the confidant of Karl Marx, said that an agnostic is a shamefaced atheist, and Lord Roll said in another place that many a Euro-sceptic is probably a shamefaced anti-European. Many of them are against the European Community and several wish to withdraw from it. Their hostility has come to a head over the debates on EMU.

I suppose it is possible that, despite the enthusiasms from prominent players, EMU may be postponed, perhaps for some time. To my mind, that would be an adequate solution. The problems of convergence are bound up with the difficulties of nationalism, which are likely to continue for a number of years. It is a pity that the project is being rushed by Chancellor Kohl, who wants to see it in place before he goes. His time as Chancellor is coming to an end and he is in a hurry.

Although outside EMU we can still decide many things for ourselves, the area of independence is dwindling all the time. As examples of that, we have only to observe the effect of Alan Greenspan's decision last week, which brought turmoil to the City of London and many other parts of the world, and the effect of Bundesbank decisions. Can anyone believe that an EMU with Britain outside will not have an even greater effect upon our domestic economic and financial affairs?

My preferred solution is for there to be some delay in the implementation of EMU. There is more to be done in the matter of convergence, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston said, and such a postponement may yet happen. But at this stage, we must assume that EMU will go ahead roughly as planned and roughly according to the timetable envisaged. In all of this, we must assess the level of uncertainty in what we propose, and I regard staying out of EMU as representing the greater risk. If we stay out and EMU is successful, it will be likely in some ways—some of them unknown at this stage—to discriminate against us. As we know, the absent are always in the wrong. Excluded from the inner councils, our weight will be diminished.

A real danger, as mentioned by the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South, is a struggle between Frankfurt and London, and we should not take too much comfort from the expectation that all our skills will remain with us in such a contest.

Mr. Dykes: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sheldon: I am sorry, but I have only ten minutes.

We should not take too much comfort from the rules that we hope to establish. We must not depend on rules—which will not always help us—but on practice. Even if EMU is not successful—it is interesting to speculate on the mechanics for dealing with an unsuccessful EMU—we will gain no credit and no friends for any hostility that we may show.

The major question for Dublin, and beyond Dublin, should be whether the criteria for convergence will be firm. Will the criteria be tough in terms of admissions? If they are, the stability criteria will be less severe. If the criteria are firm and the admissions policy is tough, the stability criteria will be less severe. What steps can be taken to ensure that latecomers to EMU come in without discrimination? Ideally, there should be no disadvantage in late entry, providing that the conditions are met. In practice, the founders will have a greater influence on both the rules and the way in which they operate.

I am uneasy about establishing a rigid formula for stabilisation, convergence or any of the criteria that will decide important matters. If a country is in financial difficulties, it has the choice at present of raising interest rates, raising taxes or cutting expenditure. Under EMU, that range of choice—as well as devaluation—will not be available. The only choices available will be increasing taxes or reducing expenditure. What happens if convergence is not realised? What if a Government cannot politically increase taxes or reduce expenditure? What if they cannot do any of these things? In such circumstances, how real a discipline is a fine?

There are political problems, and there are things that the Government can and cannot do. It would be foolish to assume that all we need is to establish a rule that will apply to bring countries into line. What happens if a Government face lorries and tractors on the roads, or even greater civil disturbance? In that connection, how real a discipline will a fine be? The political imperative may be much greater than the financial one. In any case, it is a peculiar comment to impose fines on a country that will not pay because it cannot pay.

We must accept that we cannot be too rigid. There are those who say that, once one starts easing the criteria, it will bring problems—particularly for the Germans, who will feel that they are exchanging their strong deutschmark for a weak euro. It is unlikely that the euro will be anything like as strong as the deutschmark, as too many countries are involved and there are too many problems. We must not be too rigid, and if that is the price for achieving EMU, the Germans may well have second thoughts about it.

Maastricht did not represent the end of nationalism, and we must allow for some of the practices, as well as the characteristics, of certain countries, which cannot be dismissed. We will not bring about social change in a year or two just because we have something called EMU. We must accommodate these matters and if that is the spirit in which the negotiations are conducted, EMU may well succeed. In our dealings with the Community, history is unswervingly against our claim to high statesmanship. So often we have assumed that that which we do not like will fail. Let us for once in our miserable experience in these matters assume that that which so many expect to fail may actually succeed.

6.24 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): The other day, I was speaking at the Henley management centre. Perhaps because it was near Henley, I was asked whether I was ever invited to speak in Europe, given my views. I was delighted to affirm that I received many invitations, including that one for that day in Henley. Here I am again, today—speaking in Europe. Britain must be proud that we are a part of Europe—but Europe is our continent, not our country. We believe, rightly, in a Europe of nations. I agree with M. Santer that we are fast approaching an important decision point for us and the other member states of the European Community.

We have the Chancellor Kohl version of how we should develop. Chancellor Kohl wishes to have ever deeper and wider integration, and he wishes to see ever more powers going to the centre. He is quite open in saying that he likes the German federal model, where there is strong central control but where the centre decides to devolve some of the powers and decisions to the lander, the individual regional parliaments. The authority for that system comes from the democratic authority of the German people, expressed through the German parliament.

That is why I believe that Britain must offer an alternative to Chancellor Kohl's vision. I believe that true democratic legitimacy will remain in Germany in the German Parliament, and will remain in Britain in the British Parliament. We therefore need a Europe of nations, because I do not believe that we are about to establish democratic legitimacy at the European level through the European Parliament, which would be the only democratic way of proceeding towards a more centralised or a federal state.

What need does a Europe of nations have of an anthem, a common passport, a common flag, a supreme court or all the other institutions that are clearly the institutions of a proto-state in the making? We must now put it clearly to the British people—the choice is there. It is said that it would be quite impossible for Britain to negotiate a common market but not common government. It is said that we would be isolated in Europe if we took the Government's view of a Europe of nations, developed it and thought it through for ourselves, and for the other member states who like our vision better than Chancellor Kohl's.

There are a lot of people in western Europe who share exactly our view. They want the European Community to add to the prosperity and happiness of the peoples of western Europe, and they wish us to co-operate and to find out whether there are things that Governments can better do together by their mutual agreement. But just as there are growing resentments in our country about the number of ways in which the European Court and the European institutions interfere in our democratic decisions, so there are tensions and disagreements visible in other member states of the Community about the interferences, and the consequences of those interferences, in their policies.

The biggest step towards federal union that is currently before us is the step to a single currency. It is wrong to suggest that no power would transfer from this country if we abolished the pound and joined a single currency. Of course it would. We know that the power to settle interest

[Mr. John Redwood]

rates and to influence exchange rates would go from British institutions and from this Parliament to the institution of a central bank.

We know that there would have to be limits to the budget deficit that we would be allowed to pursue. People might say that we should never want a bigger budget deficit than that laid down in the treaty. None the less, the right to choose to have a bigger or smaller budget deficit would have been limited by that decision.

Of course, if we joined, soon afterwards we would be told that to make it really work one needed common taxation throughout the Union, and common financial and expenditure policies. People are already beginning to suggest that. In Brussels, they are saying today that we need to bring our value added tax rates together. They are saying that there should be a minimum and a maximum rate, and their intention would be to narrow the gap between the rates until there was a standard rate throughout the Community. They want us to impose VAT on the same items as other member countries.

We already see that they think that it would be unfair of the United Kingdom to get rid of capital taxes, because other countries in western Europe have them and we would obviously have an advantage if we got rid of them while they retained them. We might find that they would try to build that into the system, and that a limit would be placed on this Parliament removing or reducing capital taxes below a certain level.

People would soon discover that, as Chancellor Kohl said, with a single currency one would need a political union to have any chance of making it work. Let us be open in our debates about what is proposed, and be positive in suggesting an alternative that might be better.

The best parallel that I can draw for the single currency is with taking out a joint bank account. It would be extremely foolish to do so with someone that one did not know very well, or with a mere friend or neighbour. Normally, one would contemplate doing it only with someone with whom one had a very intimate relationship. That joint account can work only if the two or more parties have confidence in each other's actions and know how much money they are putting in and drawing out.

If we combined with other countries and had a single currency, it would be like having a joint bank account. Indeed, the deposit account part has to transfer to the central authorities. Our foreign exchange reserves would have to be taken to the central bank in Frankfurt and the deposit account would be controlled by that institution and would no longer be under the control of the British people through their Bank of England and this House, which has democratic control over British institutions.

The joint current account would be a little freer, but one would discover that there had to be strong controls over what was put in and taken out, because the consequence of one country borrowing would be to drive up the interest rates of the others. The consequence of one part of the union over-borrowing is to affect the creditworthiness and stature of the currency of the others. There is an optimum size for currency unions. A currency union stretching over France, Germany and Britain, given their different labour markets, the inflexibility between them and the different styles and histories of the countries, could not work as a practical proposition.

I trust that, in Dublin and beyond, our Government will represent a different view of Europe—not wishing to withdraw, not saying that we have no time for Europe and its institutions, but saying that we want those institutions to have limited powers over the peoples of western Europe, and that those limited powers should be used to promote jobs, prosperity and free trade, not to undermine those things.

The policies that are leading to monetary union are destroying jobs on the continent of Europe, and they need to be reversed. There is no need for all those people to be out of work in France, Italy and Germany. It is the direct result of exchange manipulation, and the interest rate and budget policies required under the Maastricht treaty. Those countries would be much better advised to take a leaf out of our book and to have floating exchange rates and interest rates that really work for their economies—policies that promote growth rather than stifle it.

On the other issues, I hope that the Government will demand a better deal on beef and fish. I hope that they will say that independent nations co-operating with one another cannot be answerable to a supreme court that overturns Acts of Parliament. Of course there needs to be a court to adjudicate trade disputes between parties, but it should have some limit on its power if it wishes to overturn sovereign decisions of sovereign Parliaments, solemnly expressed in the light of the treaty and the advice of the European institutions.

I hope that we will say that we want a clear opt-out on social and employment policy, which really works. I trust that we will be saying that, on matters of the European budget, we do not want any more money to pass to European institutions—certainly not before they have tightened up on fraud and waste, and probably never, because we find their present requirements high enough.

I do not believe that it is unrealistic to negotiate that agenda. We have vetoes over every treaty change that other members states wish to propose—over the regulations they need to develop their currency union. We should use those vetoes constructively, saying that we will not lift them so that they can progress in the way that they want until we, Britain, have got the satisfaction we deserve on the fish, beef, court and budget issues—things that matter very much to us.

We should go in there proud that we are the second biggest contributor financially to the Community, proud that we make a big contribution to western European defence, proud that we are a successful economy trading within the European Community and well beyond it, and proud that we are a global nation with global vision, capable of influencing around the world and trading—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Time is up. I call Mr. Jimmy Hood.

6.35 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): It is good that we are finally having this debate on the Floor of the House. The Select Committee on European Legislation, which I chair, thought the matter important enough to recommend that the three European monetary union documents be debated on the Floor. It is not something we do lightly, but nevertheless that was our unanimous recommendation, and we were confident that the House would endorse it.

Unfortunately, the debate is not on a substantive and amendable motion as the Committee would have preferred, but I am not inclined to be too ungrateful to the Leader of the House. Indeed, in the Christmas spirit, I find myself somewhat sympathetic towards him and his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and perhaps even to the Chancellor, because it seems that, every time they see a light at the end of the tunnel, it turns out to be an on-coming Euro-sceptic train.

The Government's refusal to allow time for the House to debate the documents was bad politics. It was the bad judgment that flows from a Government who are directionless and void of a firm strategy other than to do anything to keep from self-destruction. The integrity of Parliament was in danger of being held up to ridicule. For that reason as much as for any other, my Committee was determined to fight so fiercely against the Government's refusal to sanction this debate. I should place on record my appreciation to all those hon. Members who supported my Committee by appending their names to our motion.

In the time available, I shall concentrate on three lessons of this whole affair. The first is the scrutiny process. The sixth report of my Committee, which was published on Monday, was listed on yesterday's Order Paper. It reminds the House of recommendations that we have made, which have been given a ringing endorsement by the present row.

I shall give two examples. First, we think that there should be a general agreement that, when the Select Committee recommends a debate on the Floor of the House, which we do sparingly, the Government should have to seek the House's approval before it can refer the matter to a Standing Committee. Secondly, we think that there is a strong argument—as the Chancellor's statements in this case have shown—for adapting the questions plus debate format of European Standing Committees to the Floor of the House procedure. I commend that report to the House.

In the summer, the Select Committee published a major report on all aspects of the scrutiny system—how it works, its strengths and weaknesses, and how it could be improved. We made a number of proposals to make it much more effective. The main thing that is wrong with the scrutiny system in the House is that it is not sufficiently well known by Members. The system provides endless opportunities for European issues to be examined in detail, both in the House and outside it, yet it is woefully under-used.

We do our job on the Scrutiny Committee every week, publishing our blue books of analysis and criticism, and we are right up to date: we were the first Select Committee to go on the Internet. If any hon. Members want to surf the Internet and find about European issues, they are welcome.

Scrutiny is not an end in itself. We are a bit of a burglar alarm: we can tell people when someone is trying to get into their bathroom window, but at that point it is up to hon. Members to do something about it. I hope that one positive result of the fuss of the past month will be to raise the profile of European scrutiny and to get people to use the process to its full potential. The report we published in July is an ideal handbook, and I recommend it to the House.

It is incumbent on me to assure the House that our scrutiny system compares well with those of other Parliaments in the Union. Some hold the Danish system up as the best, but I am not a convert to that view. It is fair to say that, had the Danes been dealing with those European monetary union documents, they would not have been able to have the reports that we had, or, indeed, to hold this debate on the Floor of the House.

The events of the past few weeks have hammered home the point that national Parliaments must have their own distinct voice in the Union. The European Parliament has a role to play, but it is a different role, and we should understand the difference. For two years, the Scrutiny Committee has been pressing for the role of national Parliaments to be enhanced. We have made a number of suggestions, some of which have fallen on deaf ears, but I hope that more ears will listen in the future.

A principal suggestion is that there should be a four-week notice period between all national Parliaments receiving the official text of any legislative or related proposal and the Council of Ministers being able to take a decision. Under our proposal, there would be time for scrutiny and debate, if necessary, in national Parliaments. We—and, more importantly, our constituents—would not be bounced as they have been in the past. I am glad to say that, in Dublin in October, at the Conference of European Affairs Committees, known as COSAC, we achieved unanimity in favour of our suggestion among the 25 committees attending.

Again, in the spirit of Christmas, I recognise the support that our proposal has had from both the Foreign Secretary and the Minister, who tabled the appropriate treaty amendment for the intergovernmental conference.

No decision taken by a British Government will be as important as the one on European monetary union and the single currency. The Chancellor was right yesterday when he pointed to the positive benefits of our membership, while others, most of them of his own party, are so hostile to Europe that they sometimes sound like, and appear to have much in common with, headless chickens.

It was sad that the Foreign Secretary, who spoke for 46 minutes today, spent 38 minutes trying to appease his party before he mentioned the Labour party. My right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor made an outstanding contribution to the debate yesterday, as did my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary today. My party is committed to Europe and to being at the heart of it. However, as both my right hon. Friends said, the convergence criteria must not and cannot be fudged. Real convergence of real economies will bring great benefits if the United Kingdom is involved.

If it is in our national interest to be in, and if our people would be better off in than out, the House will first take the decision to recommend that, and a referendum of the people will make the final decision. I only wish that those on the extreme nationalist wing of the argument would address our national interest instead of indulging in the depressing xenophobia that we have heard over the past few days.

I hope that the sound and fury of the past four weeks have taught us two useful lessons: the first about how we should deal with European matters now and in the future, and the second underlining the importance of national Governments in the process of European decision making. If we have achieved that, perhaps it has been worth while, but I suspect that nothing short of a general election and a new Government will resolve the matter.

6.45 pm

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): It is a particular pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) and to congratulate him on the immense amount of hard work that he and the Select Committee on European Legislation do. He referred to the origins of this two-day debate, and I want to say a couple of things in that context.

The hon. Gentleman has a tremendous amount of work to do, and I am a little concerned by his 27th report, which refers to the suggestion that he might extend his operations into broader European matters than merely legislation. Such matters might more appropriately be dealt with by the Foreign Affairs Select Committee or, possibly, by a specific European committee. That is a matter that we will need to discuss.

At all events, it is clear that the current arrangements for scrutiny of European legislation, despite all the hon. Gentleman's efforts, are not satisfactory. It is right that he should act as a filter, but I think that the present system of European Standing Committees A and B does not work satisfactorily. I hope that, in the next Parliament, it will be possible to reconsider my suggestion that the departmental Select Committees with expertise in the area should have sub-committees of some of the members of the Committee concerned with the particular departmental matters and others from outside. Those sub-committees could then examine matters in greater depth, under the supervision, in effect, of the Scrutiny Committee.

I have a further procedural point regarding the 10-minute rule. We all understand why it is necessary to limit speeches to 10 minutes to allow more people to speak, but something extremely bad is happening to Front-Bench speeches. Ministers and shadow Ministers are giving way far too often—the old tradition was to give way once, twice or, at the outside, three times—with the result, both yesterday and today, that, while Front-Benchers have been on their feet, we have been engaging not in debate but in conversation. That is not good for the House.

I believe that the Government's policy, of first negotiating the opt-out from the single currency and then maintaining the option, is right. If we were to say at this stage whether we intended to join, that would seriously diminish our ability to negotiate, and that would be extremely bad, because we need to exercise our influence. I do not understand those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who want to take what I view as a premature decision on the issue, given that we have the opt-out, because that would reduce our ability to shape Europe in the way we would like.

I am even more puzzled by the way in which many of my colleagues are creating dissent to an extent that could well lead to the election of a Labour Government, which would have precisely the result that those who take the most sceptical attitude to Europe say they are most determined to prevent. That is an extremely important point.

We must consider what the Chancellor and the Prime Minister and the others involved in the negotiations ought to achieve. Much attention has been paid to the convergence criteria. There is already a great deal of fudge about them, not least in respect of the debt-GDP ratio, as well as the actual deficits. The Chancellor said yesterday that we must worry not only about the arithmetic but about whether there is genuine convergence. I do not believe that there is; nor do I believe that it can be achieved in the time scale that has been set. As I have stressed before, there will be a core currency, not a single currency. If countries go ahead without having had convergence over any length of time, the system will break down and they will have to consider how to get out of the core currency.

There will be a period in which the euro will operate alongside other currencies. That will be period of frightful trauma if countries have gone ahead without adequate convergence. Countries are seeking to achieve convergence by repressive measures. We have only to watch television to see people in various countries protesting about measures that are designed to enable them to enter a single currency. If those countries lock themselves into a core currency, the tensions will go on indefinitely. The strains will be such that those countries will not be able to maintain the currency. I hope that the Government will stress in the negotiations the problems of proceeding in that headlong way, which I believe will result in disaster.

It may be that the countries in a single currency will succeed in keeping it going, but if they do, the German idea that the euro will be as strong as the deutschmark is absurd; it clearly will not be. If we get what I have described previously as a camembert currency, with a soft centre, the euro will go down and we will be left with le pound fort. That may give cause for concern in respect of competitiveness, but it may also have advantages.

If countries go ahead with the single currency, there will be the question of the rate at which each country joins. There have been comparisons with the gold standard. We should remember what happened when Winston Churchill took us back on to the gold standard at the wrong rate. If countries go into the core currency at the wrong rate, it will cause serious problems. I hope that the Chancellor will bring home to our European partners the dangers of going ahead in the way they seem to be going.

The speech of the shadow Chancellor yesterday was deplorable. He was more concerned with rumours about conversations that might have happened in some café than with the substance of the issue. On the stability pact, the word "fines" did not once cross his lips.

I am seriously concerned about the matter. Historically, parliamentary democracy rests on the control of money: the right to raise taxes and control expenditure. While I do not accept all the arguments about a reduction in our sovereignty, I am worried about fines. They are a negation—a take-over—of sovereignty of a different order. We will have a supranational authority which automatically, or without our consent, could impose fines on us. Comparison has been made with German reparations after the first world war.

Mr. Dykes: Ridiculous.

Sir Terence Higgins: It is not ridiculous, in respect of either scale or effect. The difference is that, with reparations, the Germans borrowed to pay. With fines, we will not be allowed to borrow more, so the House will have no option but to raise taxes or cut expenditure. That strikes at the basis of Parliament. I therefore hope that, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor negotiates, he will accept that we should not go along with fines.

I fully accept that, if we are going ahead with the single currency, we will need some supervision, with good statistics and so on, but fines are a different matter. I realise that there is a danger that one country may borrow too much, but there will be strong pressure on it to put the matter right. We had a long period of currency stability under the Bretton Woods agreement, but no one suggested that the International Monetary Fund should impose fines. The system could work perfectly well without them.

In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), Mr. Kaletsky spelt out in an excellent article the possible extent of such fines. They are not out of line—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dykes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I could not attend yesterday's debate, because I was visiting the European Parliament. I was given to understand by colleagues that yesterday's debate was to have been primarily on economic and monetary union and today's on the intergovernmental conference. I have a brilliant speech on the IGC lined up.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There may have been a misunderstanding. Today's debate is about the European Union.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There cannot be a further point of order because I have already ruled on the matter. Is this a different point of order?

Mr. Mackinlay: Yes. After tonight's debate, could you consider whether, when the Leader of the House announced the business last week, it was clearly stated that the IGC was to be the subject of debate today and EMU yesterday?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have already ruled on that. This debate is on the European Union. The hon. Gentleman said that he had a different point of order, which I allowed accordingly.

6.56 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): The only matter that I want to clarify is whether those exchanges ate into my 10 minutes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) spoke on economic and monetary union yesterday; I shall talk about the intergovernmental conference. Like my hon. Friend in response to the Chancellor's remarks yesterday, I welcome the more robust pro-Europeanism expressed by the Foreign Secretary today. The Prime Minister also expressed it rather well in his television interview at the weekend.

The bad news for the Conservatives is that it is too little, too late. If they had shown firmer resolve at the top of the Government, they might not have got into the terrible quagmire that has developed since the Maastricht treaty, with the whipless Tories and so on. It is not merely a case of the tail wagging the dog; the tail has got bigger and bigger because those in charge of the animal have not imposed the necessary discipline.

The Foreign Secretary's comments on the IGC were strange, coming from a Conservative. He bewailed the tendency in Europe towards endless modification. I had always thought that one of the great tenets of British Conservatism was that our unwritten constitutional procedures gave us limitless scope for endless modification—not pulling the plant up by the roots to see how it was growing, but pruning and nurturing it in a conservative way. His complaints about modification in the context of the IGC are inconsistent with that view.

In the latter stages of his speech, the Foreign Secretary said that the differences among the Opposition were substantive and very real. He would have better addressed those remarks over his shoulder to his Back Benchers, where the fatal—from the point of view of the British Tory party—splits are all too evident.

One thing is coming through clearly as the IGC process continues: the underlying arrogance that we hear, particularly from Conservative Members with a certain cast of mind on matters European. They suggest that the process of negotiation involves the British explaining to everyone else in Europe—perhaps not even bothering to explain, but simply haranguing them—that we know best, that our procedures are unimpeachable and that if everyone else followed our lead they would get on much better.

Negotiation, by definition, involves give and take—meeting people halfway and accepting that other traditions and cultures can have a beneficial impact on ours, just as we like to believe that our cultures and traditions can have a worthwhile impact on others. The process of negotiation as conducted by the present Government is what Lord Carrington, in a different context several years ago, famously described as megaphone diplomacy.

I am glad that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) is still in his place. I wish to pick up not so much what he said in the House tonight as what he said on the vexed issue of qualified majority voting, which goes to the heart of the intergovernmental process. The only surprise about the Government's White Paper "A Partnership of Nations", published earlier in the year, was that it did not have a question mark at the end of its title. Throughout their period of office, the Government have flagged up and welcomed the extension of QMV, particularly its role in delivering near completion of the single market.

In a review of a book co-written by Christopher Booker—a name to conjure with in this context—published some time ago in *The Daily Telegraph*, the right hon. Member for Wokingham wrote:

> "We now need to try and make the single market a freer market: a market with fewer laws and more rights of access for our goods and services. We should also say that now that Europe's idea of a single market is completed, we should revert to voting on the basis of unanimity."

His analysis is flawed and his prescription is wrong.

On the key subject of the utilities, is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, in June of this year, electricity liberalisation—something that the Government favour and that they say is in this country's vital national interest—passed through the Council of Ministers only because it

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was subject to QMV? The French were threatening to block liberalisation procedures. Gas liberalisation is another such case. I therefore disagree with the prescription suggested by the right hon. Gentleman; there is clearly a need for further QMV in more areas that suit Britain and suit the proper liberalisation of the single market.

Mr. Redwood: We should try to persuade our partners to agree to bring about the good news in their economies that we have brought about in ours with utility deregulation. We should not, however, have the right to make them do it under QMV. We would derive a great advantage under the system of unanimity, because our partners would not be able to impose on us rules and regulations that we do not like.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): What about the common fisheries policy?

Mr. Kennedy: My hon. Friend, who, for constituency reasons, speaks with more direct knowledge of such matters than perhaps anyone else in the House, asks how on earth we could achieve reform of the common fisheries policy if we were to take the "heads we win, tails you lose" approach of the right hon. Member for Wokingham.

The Conservatives' confusion over QMV is but a mirror image of what we hear from the top. When the Foreign Secretary appeared before the Select Committee on European Legislation on 13 February this year, he said:

"If there were an area of EU policy which could only be advanced through Majority Voting and which we were convinced would serve an important UK interest, then it would be foolish and illogical of us not to support Majority Voting in that area."

What did the Minister of State who is handling the minutiae of the discussions say to the same Committee, as reported in the *Financial Times* in the past week?

"We will not accept any undermining or dilution of the veto in any circumstances".

The Foreign Secretary says one thing and the Minister of State, who is handling the detail of the IGC, contradicts him. It is no wonder that the Conservative party is in such an abject mess.

There are areas where we should retain a national veto. I should have thought there were primarily four of them—budgetary and tax matters; constitutional issues, specifically treaty changes; the deployment of national forces; and social security and employment promotion measures in the context of the social chapter—but elsewhere, if we are to maintain the momentum of Europe, we must, in our own national interest, apply a sensible, qualified extension of majority voting in a pragmatic way.

It is a shame that we never hear from the Government any discussion at the IGC of proportional representation for the next diet of European elections. I pay tribute to our sister party, the FDP, in west Germany, and Werner Hoyer, who has raised the subject consistently.

We have heard a great deal lately about the most recent proposals for common borders policy that have emerged in the context of the IGC. That is a red rag to a bull for the Euro-sceptics, and there is much hysteria about it. The United Kingdom should, of course, retain domestic control over its borders until and unless there is a clear political, administrative and public acceptance of enhanced security for European frontiers as a whole. It would be wrong, however, to deny or decry the fact that there is much cross-border activity, such as anti-drug trafficking, on which it makes sense to have cross-border co-operation and co-ordination for the benefit of all citizens of the EU.

Whatever the outcome of the IGC—and the parallel, and probably slightly longer, discussions on EMU—one thing is clear from the division that was so graphically drawn yesterday: the Chancellor was supported by perhaps 20 per cent. of Conservative Back Benchers but, despite the detailed and principled policy differences, received pretty general acceptance and support for his position from the Opposition.

It is therefore clear that we cannot have a sane debate that reflects the realities of the European issue when the Government are caught in the headlights of their own divisions. That is why a referendum that flushes the argument out into the country will be both necessary and desirable. I believe that, in due course—as before—the voters of this country will use a referendum to commend the further sensible and progressive integration of Britain with the rest of Europe.

7.8 pm

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): I agree almost totally with what my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) said yesterday and what Lord Owen said in a debate in the other place last week. I shall not repeat all their points. Like them, I have always been a passionate and convinced supporter of British membership of the European Union, and I remain so.

At the first national conference at which I spoke when I was a student, I proposed a resolution urging the Government of the day to join the original six and become an original member of the treaty of Rome but, like my two colleagues, I do not therefore embrace the concept of the single currency—certainly not at this stage of European development.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor put the economic advantages and disadvantages of the single currency concisely and impeccably yesterday, and made it clear that he is genuinely waiting to decide. I agree entirely with his analysis; I differ from him only in that I am more strongly persuaded of the disadvantages. At this moment—I stress, at this moment—I am opposed to British membership of the first phase of the single currency. The time to judge that matter properly and definitively will come later. I do not know exactly when that will be. I know what the timetable is at the moment, but I recall many European negotiations where the clock has been stopped and the timetable has moved backwards.

My inclination at present is to look to the disadvantages because I believe that the pressures for the single currency are pushing us too far, too fast, both politically and economically. I fear that it may bear the seeds of its own destruction—I follow a number of the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins). I speak not merely of the fudging of the criteria before entry—which many of us are now noticing is happening in other countries—but of the likely impossibility of holding to those criteria later, depending on who initially enters the single monetary union.

Different economies are at substantially different levels of development and growth. There are different levels of inflation; different pressures on public expenditure and debt; different levels of, and pressures on, unemployment. The political pressures that some Governments may be unable to resist when holding to the criteria may mean that the criteria will be breached. Alternatively, there may have to be transfers of expenditure between different member states on a much greater scale than anything we have hitherto experienced. Real tensions could therefore build up if we move too far, too fast.

In the context of public expenditure, I want briefly to mention pensions. I share the concerns of many about the funding of our pensions in 10 to 20 years' time being in a much better state than those in most other European Union member states, with the possible exception of the Netherlands. I know that there are constraints—indeed sanctions—against the transfer of public expenditure from one country to another to fund the huge pension burden that many other member states will face in 10 to 15 years' time, but I was impressed by the Social Security Committee's report on the point. The response of the President of the European Commission was certainly not consoling.

We all know that, at a certain stage, pressures will become such that the pension burden may be funded from some central, European public expenditure pot or, indeed, from the central reserves. I am concerned about that, and think that we need much firmer sanctions and clear commitments to prevent it. There is also the problem of whether moving towards a single currency at this stage is compatible with the timetable of, and progress with the widening of, the EU, as well as a mass of other technical issues. For all those reasons, I am doubtful.

There is everything to be said for our participating fully and positively in the negotiations, as we have been doing. If the single currency goes ahead and breaks up, we would have made our case and be able to play a much more crucial part in putting the pieces together again. If it succeeds, against my expectations at the moment—I keep stressing that we do not know exactly what shape the final proposals for the single currency will be—and we decide to join later, which is an option that I am strongly in favour of keeping open, we will have helped to shape it.

I spent four years of my ministerial life negotiating on and trying to reform the common agricultural policy. I entirely agree with what my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) said about that. If we had been in on the early discussions of the CAP, we would have had nothing like the problems that we have had subsequently.

If there is a two-speed Europe as a result of some member states going ahead with the single currency and our not doing so, we will participate in shaping the kind of problems that will arise from a two-speed Europe. In that respect, I share the views expressed by my right hon. Friends the Members for Witney and for Wokingham. I do not agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham on a number of the points that he made, but I agree with him that we are not alone in Europe in the kind of developments that we want. Indeed, I am much impressed by the number of German and French business men who keep urging us to maintain our position on the social chapter because they agree with it.

The position that I hold leads me, unlike some of my hon. Friends, to the view that we should in no way be shackling our Government in the present negotiations. I fear that some of the commitments and comments that have been made have had precisely that effect. I repeat that I genuinely believe that we cannot decide on a single currency now, because we do not know its final shape. I remain doubtful about whether we should join.

Above all, I should stress that to speak in this way is not to be a Euro-sceptic. To be cautious about a development that we genuinely think is taking place too far and too fast does not mean that we do not continue to want to be strong and committed members of the wider European Union. There is a world of difference between my position and those who are commonly described as Euro-sceptics.

I am glad that the Referendum party has been flushed out and forced to indicate what its question will be. It is quite clear from that question that it is advocating withdrawal from the European Union and joining a European free trade area of us and Switzerland—

Mr. Jessel: And Norway.

Mr. MacGregor: Perhaps Norway as well. That is a big deal for British business and the British economy. Some of my hon. Friends and others who carry on the debate in the media and elsewhere outside the House are being less than honest in making their points. In the final sentence of his speech yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) was honest; he faced up to the fact that the position that he holds will mean that, at some point, he will have to judge whether we should pull out of the European Union altogether. That was an honest position; I totally disagree with it, and profoundly do not join him on it.

For all the reasons that I have given, I believe that the Cabinet has got it right at the present time; it is right to suspend judgment until we see the final proposals; it is right to have a referendum if we decide to move ahead; and it is why the Cabinet should be supported.

7.14 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): It has been interesting to witness the degree of caution that has developed in the past few days' debates. From the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), who spoke yesterday from a foreign policy point of view, northwards to the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) and southwards to the right hon. Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) on the south coast, Members who might otherwise have been desperate to increase political union inside the European Community are now being rather cautious. The cause of that might be some disagreement on what is meant by political union.

Yesterday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer made some extraordinary statements. As we all know, he is a man with a most attractive means of presentation. I do not know whether anyone has analysed the construction of his sentences, the choice of his vocabulary or the quality of his voice, but I suspect that their combination not infrequently makes the implausible sound plausible and the plausible sound well founded, when often that is not so. My exchange with the Foreign Secretary at the beginning of today's debate shows that the Chancellor's

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speech yesterday was a very good example of, from some people's point of view, his best, and from the point of view of the best parliamentary debates, his worst.

The Chancellor said:

"we shall also have to consider not only the economic argument, but what EMU implies about the political future of the European Union. As I said several times already, I do not believe EMU will lead to a European super-state. If I did, I would not contemplate Britain joining it. However, we need to satisfy ourselves about the intentions of our EU partners."

I shall comment on that in two parts. The first concerns the European super-state and the political future.

The right hon. Member for South Norfolk mentioned reserves. The calculation of pension liability, on which we happen to be well off when others are not, could include currency reserves as a whole throughout the economic area of a single currency and even, I take it, reserves in banks and institutions. The uncertainties are great. Are they not also specifically political?

How can the Chancellor talk about there being no possibility of a super-state when there will be a super-currency and a super-bank? How can that in any way not be super-political as well? I put that as an unsustainable proposition, not just to the House but to anybody who may be listening. When it comes from the lips of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, it sounds reasonable, but it is totally unreasonable. I put it to the Minister who will be winding up the debate that he cannot sustain that proposition either.

The Chancellor went a bit further when he said:

"we need to satisfy ourselves about the intentions of our EU partners."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 1996; Vol. 287, c. 295.]

Did the Chancellor of the Exchequer not know what our EU partners' intentions of were? Did he not ask the Foreign Secretary?

Mr. Dykes: Are these rhetorical questions?

Mr. Spearing: The hon. Gentleman thinks that I am asking too many questions. I hope that the development of the argument disturbs him somewhat, but it gives me no cause for disturbance.

Did the Chancellor not ask anyone what our partners' intentions were? Did he not know about the solemn declaration of the European Union that was signed by Mrs. Thatcher in 1983? That was an intention of union, which must mean political union; it did not mean a football union or anything else.

Has the Chancellor forgotten the communiqué from the previous Dublin conference, on 25 and 26 June 1990? Paragraph 1 of that communiqué states that the European Council

"agreed to convene an intergovernmental Conference on Political Union; it reviewed the preparatory work for the intergovernmental Conference, already agreed, on Economic and Monetary Union; and fixed the opening dates for these two intergovernmental Conferences".

In case they have forgotten, I remind the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) and others that when Baroness Thatcher, as Prime Minister, went to Madrid and agreed the famous Delors three-part proposals for economic and monetary union, two Select Committees of the House said that we should have a debate. The right hon. Member for Worthing was then Chairman of the Treasury and Civil Service Committee and I was Chairman of the EEC Legislation Committee, now chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood). Both Committees were unanimous in asking for a debate.

Did we get a debate? No, we did not. Baroness Thatcher went off and, in effect, gave her consent to an intergovernmental conference on monetary union to be held. She had no choice, in the circumstances. The same thing happened when she went to Dublin in 1990: she could not say no.

We now have the meshing together of political and monetary union, one impinging on the other. If that is not a super-state, I do not know what is. Whatever view hon. Members take of the advantages—or what they believe to be the advantages—or the disadvantages of the European single market, the union, or whatever one prefers to call it, it is a coming state.

Earlier, I disagreed with the Foreign Secretary about his use of the word "federal" which, as the hon. Member for Harrow, East knows, for the past 10 or 15 years I have repeatedly said is inconsistent and wrong. The European Union is the prototype of a unitary state. All the institutions of government are in place, ready to expand at the expense of national Parliaments.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Spearing: I am glad to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) agrees.

Every Member of the House should have an elementary knowledge of constitutional structures. There is a great difference between a unitary state and a federal state. The treaties of the European Union and its predecessor, the common market, are unique in that they have tried to impose an over-arching unitary state on independent and otherwise sovereign states.

That difference undergirds the misunderstandings that arise between the German use of the word "federal"—which guarantees a degree of distribution of power among the Länder, which are historic communities, building up to the Zollverein and their specific form of federation—and the use by Conservative Members and some Opposition Members of the word "federal" when they mean, "We fear a unitary state." That is fundamental to the mess that the Government have got themselves into, as have the European Movement and others.

Unemployment affects all members of the European citizenry, if I may so call it: we have been forced to be citizens of the treaty state because that is what it is, whether we like it or not, without consent—from democratic motion, so-called.

The shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), mentioned unemployment and said that words should be added to the treaty. He is right. One cannot create—except in bureaucracy to run conferences about unemployment—one extra job simply by writing it into the treaty. The treaty bears down hard and says that nothing can be done unless it is in the treaty; anything else is undemocratic. No political party can advocate anything that is not within the terms of the treaty, whether one likes those terms or not, whether it is capitalist or collectivist.

Any form of partnership between private and public enterprise—any subsidy, any matter of finance, any specification—must be within the terms of the treaty. That is undemocratic in itself, but the aspect that affects unemployment is that there is forced competition. Forced competition in a time of great advance and change means unemployment. That is what the treaty means, and we can do little about it, even by changing the terms of the treaty that is at fault.

7.25 pm

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): On 21 May 1992, I spoke on Second Reading of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill. I voted for Second Reading and against Third Reading. At that time I was worried about the agricultural policy, the single currency and all regulations from Europe. I am still worried about the single currency, and I am now worried about over-regulation, the opt-outs and how we should proceed.

The exchange rate mechanism did untold harm to this country. It put our prosperity back four years, increased unemployment and destroyed much of our reserves. To my mind, the single currency would repeat that. I do not support a single currency. Like the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), I speak as a schoolmaster. A single currency is similar to a three-legged race, like those that are run in infants schools. People can run together, but if there is a three-legged race they all fall down because they run at different speeds. That is exactly what happens to economies, and they will never work any other way. I do not want the single currency.

I continue to be worried about the common agricultural policy, especially bearing in mind the harm that it has done to the third world. Third-world countries can no longer sell us their goods at the right price, and these days we have to give aid instead of trade, when trade is always better for those countries. I am still not happy about that.

Europe is becoming over-regulated. If the trend continues, it will become an over-regulated morass. There is every sign that, in terms of prosperity, growth in inward investment and trade, Europe is falling behind not just America and the far east but other parts of the world. Our exports to the far east have doubled proportionately compared with our exports to Europe. Similarly, the amount invested by British business men using their own money has decreased as a percentage of investment in Europe. When we entered the common market, 29 per cent. of our investment overseas was in Europe. The proportion has now dropped to 20 per cent. and those people are making decisions for their own firms.

I wonder whether we need Europe if we have GATT. If we do not have GATT, we must be in a geographical body. But if we have GATT and free trade, we can compete throughout the world. Thus, I believe that Europe is becoming an incubus on our economy.

Size does not really matter. The countries that have expanded most, economically, since the second world war are small countries, such as Taiwan, which was expelled from the United Nations. That small island, with a population of about a third of this country and with little agriculture, now has an economy almost equal to ours. The same applies to Hong Kong and Korea. If a country makes goods of the right quality, sells them at the right price and provides the right service, it will do well. If it does not, it will not. As they say, if you make a better mousetrap in the forests of Canada, the world will beat a path to your door.

We are not dependent on Europe. I do not say that we should come out of it: I simply say that it would not be a disadvantage if we were forced to do so because of other circumstances. Europe needs us more than we need Europe. Opposition Members do not have the same confidence in the people of Britain as I have. I am confident in this country. I do not speak as a little Englander. Those who want to keep us in Europe under any terms are little Englanders because they have no confidence in this country or in what we are doing. If one believes that this country can help other countries and provide a good standard of living, I do not see how we could improve matters.

I shall conclude because this is a short debate and many other hon. Members want to speak. Britain has always made goods well and has sold to the rest of the world. We are the same people as we were before, and so long as we have free trade, we have no need to be propped up in any other way. I am suspicious of a single currency and all that goes with it. It would be of no advantage to this country.

Those of us who are Euro-sceptics should not be called little Englanders: the little Englanders are those who do not believe that this country could cope without being linked with other countries. This country has the same enterprise and the same ability as we had in the past. I do not say for one minute that we should come out of Europe, but I do not fear the possibility.

7.31 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) is an honest man and a Methodist, but he was only a step away from saying that he would favour withdrawal because he saw no serious disadvantages for our country in being outside the Community.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) put forward arguments in the same direction. He argued in an Anglo-centric way—I stress the "Anglo"—that Britain could recreate Europe in our image, and that, if we stood firm, if we were positive and proud, and if we set out our stall as we would want, our European partners would inevitably see the virtue of our position and follow us. That was the logic of the right hon. Gentleman's position.

Mr. Redwood: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Anderson: No, I must get on, because I have only 10 minutes.

The hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) spoke of repatriating elements within the competence of the European Court of Justice. In effect, part of the original treaty gave the European Court of Justice supervision and jurisdiction over a substantial part of our policy; hence, our laws within those areas will be subject to European laws. If one talks seriously about repatriating parts of the European Courts of Justice, one is only a step away from saying, "Let us withdraw from Europe and from that which our referendum agreed in 1975".

I find it puzzling that many of those who are most vocal in favour of a referendum because they think that it will decide the issue once and for all pay no heed to the

[Mr. Anderson]

decision made by our people in 1975. I therefore conclude that another referendum will not decide the issue, because people will go on arguing about it.

When our people made that decision in 1975, they voted not just for a static Europe—the Europe that existed in 1975 on the basis of the treaty of Rome and the common agricultural policy. As the right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) said so eloquently, we suffered from that because we were excluded, and we used that as a precedent, quite properly, for taking part in the current discussions on currency union. Our people voted not for a static Europe but for a dynamic Europe. In that treaty there is the ever closer union of the people of Europe, which implies evolution and development. That was starkly clear at the time of the decision in 1975.

Our partners in Europe must be amazed at the nature of the debate that we still have in this country. We still dither about our vocation and whether we are in or out. That is an absurd position. If we are to be a part of our natural region, and if we are to see where our trade flows have gone and how we can punch much harder in the world, we must be part of Europe. Would Scotch whisky manufacturers, for example, prefer to negotiate with the Japanese simply through our Trade Minister on our own as a single economy, or be part of a bloc that can negotiate hard?

Inward investment is another advantage. The Koreans and others come to this country not only because they see many natural advantages here but—the right hon. Member for Wokingham ignores this—because we are part of a wider market and a launching pad or springboard to a wider Europe. If we were outside Europe, it follows as night follows day that we would be less attractive to inward investment.

This is part of the agenda that those who still dither and pretend that little England can stand on its own ignore. Some of them claim that we could form a new European Free Trade Association. I wonder where those countries would come from. Some claim that there is an alternative economic arrangement, whereby perhaps we could talk to our American friends and form a north Atlantic free trade association. I have news for them: although, some 35 or 36 years ago, Senator Javits and others spoke about that, no lobby or serious group in the United States flirts with that idea now. It takes two to tango, and those who talk about a new EFTA or a NAFTA are indulging in the politics of illusion. That is the worst sort of illusion, which does severe damage to our country.

That is part of the burden that this country must bear, and it causes such astonishment to our partners. They are amazed that the debate on Europe in this country, particularly in the media, is so violent. It is astonishing that those with no stake in the United Kingdom—Sir James Goldsmith and Mr. Murdoch—seek, from their foreign vantage points, to influence the decision and to wallow in old illusions of sovereignty, or a populism that sells newspapers, which are irrelevant to our country.

I fully concede that there are major disadvantages, potential and actual, in a single currency. The right hon. Members for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) and for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) made those points well. As always, a balance must be struck. At the moment we see through a glass darkly. We do not know a number of different factors: membership; the convergence criteria; or the degree of fudge. Surely the sensible position, then, is to wait until many of those matters are clarified. Perhaps the nation will say that it makes sense to help in the formation of that currency, but our national interest will ensure that we are not and should not be part of the first wave. Ultimately, however, it would be absurd for us to marginalise ourselves and reduce our influence and punching power. That is an argument for wait and see. Surely that is the sensible position. We do not know so many of the intangibles.

Because of our experience in the City, we can play a major role in pointing out to the enthusiasts the problems that are likely to arise. I heartily accept the view of Chancellor Kohl as an old man in a hurry. Perhaps there is a strong argument for trying to curb some of the enthusiasm.

If there are problems, they may multiply and be exacerbated if the new members queuing to join the EU are admitted. It is odd that, as we dither on the edge, countries queue to join the EU because of the advantages that they see. The current proposition is that those countries would have to join the single currency immediately, which would create great complications.

To dither and to be divided, as the Government are, cannot be in the national interest that the Prime Minister claims to espouse. During Prime Minister's questions today, he was asked whether, if the conditions were right, he would recommend entry. He seemed to have great difficulty in answering that simple question. He had to look over his shoulder to see who was there and whether he was saying the right thing. The Chancellor yesterday was forthright and put forward the honest position. The Prime Minister could not even answer a simple question.

It is dishonest—the current word is "dissembling", which is rather Shakespearean—if one enters into negotiations with one's partners without being able to say plainly that one is negotiating on the assumption that if the conditions were right, one would enter. It is a great pity that there is such a division in the Conservative party. I accept, of course, that there are differing voices in the Labour party, but there is a fundamental difference—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

7.41 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I take up a point made eloquently yesterday by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore). His speech disposed at a stroke of the notion that the Labour party is united on the European issue. We do not need such nonsense in the debate.

The right hon. Gentleman raised the fundamental question of who governs Britain. He cited the single currency and moves towards a common foreign policy as examples of the way in which power is passing. Tactfully, perhaps, he omitted to mention the most glaring example: social policy and, in particular, how the directive on working time—the 48-hour week—is being applied in the United Kingdom.

On other occasions we can debate which party is right on that subject. I was singularly unconvinced by the comments of the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). What concerns me, however, is not the

argument, but the process. It is common ground that the two major parties are entirely divided on the issue. It is common ground that our opposition to the proposals was the opposition of the elected Government of the UK. It is common ground that at Brussels the Government have put their views forcefully and consistently against the working time proposals. When I was Employment Secretary, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar) may remember, I—and, I think, he—put the case strongly.

It is also common ground that if, God forbid, the Government were defeated at the next election or any other election, it would be open to Labour to introduce its proposals in legislation. There has not, however, been a change of Government. At Maastricht the Prime Minister negotiated an opt-out from the social chapter. As chairman of the Conservative committee on European affairs, I argued strongly for that.

To most people, that might have seemed the end of the matter, but the Commission went on as though nothing had happened. It had argued that working time was a health and safety issue. Did the Commission's position change in the light of the Maastricht opt-out? Not one jot. That was entirely contrary to the spirit of the opt-out agreed by elected Ministers. Appointed officials went smack against the declared policy of the elected Government of the UK. That is unacceptable.

The Commission argued that on a strict interpretation of a European law, its action was justified. Regrettably, the European Court upheld that view. The European Court did not, however, consider the fundamental question of whether it was right for labour law to be determined at national level or at the Brussels level. We have always argued for the national level.

There is a further aspect that I find objectionable. We are supposed to be members of a community—a union—of friendly parties working together, yet the very spirit of the Maastricht opt-out has been avoided. The message that has gone out has not been one of friendly co-operation. The message has been that, if one has discussions, one had better go armed with battalions of lawyers and sign nothing until weeks later, when every conceivable point has been covered. Above all, one should not rely on the spirit of any agreement.

Mr. Jessel: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: I should love to give way, as my hon. Friend knows, but I cannot.

When Commissioner Flynn spoke about the working time directive, he said not that it was good for health and safety but that it was good for social Europe. One of the crassest statements ever made by a senior political figure was the statement by President Santer, who warned against

"a return to the Dickensian sweatshops of the 19th century".

Working hours are not the only social issue. The issue of immigration control and frontier control is once more raising its head. Any change on that would be unacceptable to Parliament.

My views, like those of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), are not the views of a long-term Euro-sceptic. I sometimes feel that, in my two years as party chairman, I spent most of my time in conflict with those who are regarded as Euro-sceptics. Nor am I particularly influenced by foreign-owned newspapers or foreign-based politicians. I am influenced by the way in which I see the views of middle England developing. I see a marked shift of opinion against the European Union. That must be recognised.

Politicians in other European countries may not appreciate the great resentment that has built up in Britain about the unnecessary interference in our affairs. Politicians in other European countries may not agree or even care, but they should understand what is happening. They should not believe for a moment that, if there were a change of Government, the public mood would change overnight. The public mood would not change.

We are reaching a critical stage in the debate on many European issues—the hour of truth, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary called it. The real question now for the public is which party has the will, courage and determination to fight on these issues and to stand up for British interests. We know, because they say so, that the Opposition will abandon the social chapter opt-out and embrace the working time directive. We know that they live in fear of being in a minority of one in European debates. Labour was totally opposed to Europe at one stage, and it now exhibits the weakest characteristics of the European convert. The Conservatives want a Europe of the single market with maximum power devolved to individual nation states.

With humility, I say to my hon. Friends: we must decide whether we are content to carry on the internal debate or enter the real debate between the two sides in the House of Commons. The divisions on our Benches—I emphasise that they do not exist only on our Benches—will aid the election of a party whose Front Benchers adopt a view on Europe that is entirely alien from our own. We would not be easily forgiven if we allowed that to happen, as we would hand over control of British politics on Europe at a vital time in our national history.

7.50 pm

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): The current confusion in Britain arises partly from the fact that, for the best part of the past four years, the anti-European factions in British politics have made all the running. As the opinion polls have started to shift against the European project—the latest polls show a 50:50 split on the issue of remaining in Europe—those politicians who favour European union have kept their heads down rather than risk alienating marginal voters.

From the beginning, the European project was treated as the creation of a federal Europe—a united states of Europe. Its motive in the late 1940s and early 1950s was the desire to avoid another great European war. However, by the mid-1960s, that desire was no longer at the forefront of political thinking. Most people who now pursue the dream of a federal Europe—and I am one—see that as the only way in which Europe can defend its economic interests against the vast economic empire of the United States of America, which has created its own free trade association whereby it uses the mineral resources of Canada and the cheap labour pool of Mexico, and a much looser arrangement whereby Japan works with a succession of south-east Asian nations using their cheap labour.

[Mr. Ken Livingstone]

We cannot avoid the fact that the rest of Europe will create a united states of Europe—although it may take a generation. The simple issue before the British people and the House is whether we wish to be part of it or whether we shall stand outside it. The creation of a united states of Europe is not a German plot: it is led by economic forces. We must create an economic bloc that is capable of fighting for markets and of challenging American interests around the globe. That desire is not fuelled simply by nationalism. The world economy has developed in such a way as to necessitate economic blocs the size of North America or Europe in order to generate the economic strength to operate in the global market.

For example, we can no longer choose between half a dozen competing car firms within one nation. With the technologies of the future, it will be hard to sustain more than one or two major competitors in any area. At present there is room in the world for only one microprocessor producer, the Intel Corporation. The Microsoft company predominates in the personal computer operating systems industry. The world is able to sustain only two large civilian aircraft producers: Boeing and European airbus. Economic forces are driving Europe to create a genuine economic bloc, and they will ensure that the process of European union goes ahead, whether we like it or not.

The British people have been lied to by successive British Governments, who have told them that European union was just about trade and not about creating a united states of Europe. They claimed that the reasons were simply economic, whereas European statesmen and women from the left and the right talked openly from the beginning about creating a united states of Europe. Britain faces a choice: there is no future for an advanced capitalist society such as ours outside the great trading blocs. If we are not part of the European bloc—where we could be equal leaders with France and Germany—we will have to play a completely subordinate role in a relationship with the United States of America or Japan, which is even less likely.

That is why the Conservative party is torn apart—it is not a question of the Conservatives not liking Germans. Running through the Conservative party is a strong commitment to a global leadership alliance with the United States, the origins of which date back to the second world war and to the alliance between Churchill and Roosevelt. A smaller split of that nature exists on the Labour Benches. I am struck by those Labour Members of Parliament who genuinely resist the European Movement—as opposed to those who have some doubts about the Maastricht treaty or the timing of monetary union. It is hard to find any Labour Members under the age of 60 who are anti the European project, but there is a small handful of Labour Members whose thinking was shaped by the second world war and events of that period. I cannot think of one hon. Member elected to the Labour Benches in the last three intakes who is genuinely anti-Europe. I do not wish to smear anyone or cast aspersions: that is the reality.

At Question Time on Tuesday the Prime Minister claimed that there were equal divisions on both sides of the House, but that is not so. I voted against the Maastricht treaty. I am in favour of a common currency, but I want to ensure that we get the timing right. The debate within the Labour party is about getting the timing right and not repeating the mistake made by the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, the present Prime Minister, who took us into the exchange rate mechanism at a grossly overvalued level and precipitated the worst recession since the 1930s, which wiped out 10 per cent. of our manufacturing industry. They are vital issues: we must get the timing and the exchange rate level right and so on.

I think that the Bundesbank established a series of economic policies and constrictions that had appalling consequences across Europe. It did not do so deliberately: it is not wicked. The ideologies that fuel the Bundesbank are the fear of inflation and the terror of recreating the circumstances of Weimar. That society saw the collapse of its financial policies open the way to Nazism, and I can understand how that has a strong effect on the formulation of fiscal and monetary policies.

The problem is that the tight economic policies that the Bundesbank imposes on Germany and which set the standard for the rest of Europe are creating long-standing resentment and social upheaval. We have seen unrest erupt on the streets of France and a pro-fascist party receive 25 per cent. of votes in Austrian elections. Europe should say to the Bundesbank, "Your policies are making the prospect of monetary union difficult and unworkable". Anyone who travels by train—when it is running—to Paris, walks into the first cafe and orders a coffee and a croissant which costs the equivalent of £5, will realise that the franc is grossly over-valued.

Monetary union must be based on realistic policies rather than over-inflated exchange rates. The franc is locked into the same nonsense that we were locked into on the exchange rate mechanism. It is causing high unemployment. I am concerned that the ham-fisted and bureaucratic way in which the Bundesbank has led Europe towards monetary union runs the risk of derailing the project and setting it back years. It is nonsense to talk about monetary union based on a fusion of the franc at its present level with the deutschmark. The franc must be devalued, and perhaps the project should be put back to 2002.

Britain will certainly need that extra time, as the shambles that we shall inherit next year will not be turned around in 18 months. By the end of a Labour Government's first term, the British economy could have reached the levels of investment and competitiveness that would allow us to be part of a monetary union without suffering dire consequences. That is the debate that we are having on this side of the House: it will not tear us apart, and it will not cause a split in the Labour party. It is a debate about technical issues. Therefore, it is nonsense to say that there is a split that runs through the parties, and this is of an equivalent nature.

I remember that, at the age of about 16—when I was not at all terribly interested in politics; I was trying to rake up newts from the pond most the time—the first political idea that ever appealed to me was when Macmillan applied to take Britain into the Common Market, as it then was. I remember being excited about that, because I do not feel anti-European.

I heard my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) say that this is not about a unity of peoples but a unity of laws. That is not the case for my generation. I feel happy when I meet people in Madrid or Munich. I feel at home with Europeans of my generation. I do not

feel that there is something that makes me different or sets me apart from them. I look forward to the day when we get a proper united states of Europe. I hope that we see it in my lifetime, but there is no way for Britain—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is up.

8 pm

Sir Michael Spicer (South Worcestershire): I do not know whether the rest of the House was as struck as I was by the irony of hearing the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) giving a lecturette to us all on the wonders of capitalism. He was on a particularly weak point when he spoke about "big is beautiful". He might look at the recent history of IBM to clear up some of his misconceptions.

The Government's objective on Europe—a very admirable one—is to establish a close association of nation states, freely trading and associating on matters on which it is in their common interest so to do. The problem is that there are two obstacles in their way.

The first of these is the inexorable movement towards monetary union. Some people say that that is not there, particularly the Germans, but they will have a terrible shock when they read the treaty, as will their constitutional court when it looks at it more carefully; article 109j is absolutely clear; the single currency will be set up by, at the latest, 1 January 1999. That is one reason why some of us voted against the Maastricht treaty. What is more, article 109k says that the convergence rules can be bent by qualified majority voting to ensure that people can join the single currency, which they have to do by law unless the law is changed, on 1 January 1999.

Nor is it true that, by joining a single currency, one avoids the political association that goes with it. That is one of the extraordinary things that has been said in the past few days. It is quite clear that a single currency is bound to lead towards a single fiscal policy and a single taxation policy. It is not just a question of the stability pact, although that factor has emerged and shows that other things, in addition to monetary policy, are associated with a single currency.

If Europe has a single currency, it will mean a single price system, except for different cost structures for transportation or whatever, with different wages. For example, in Greece there would be German prices but Greek wages; in that case there would either be a revolution or there would be pressure for a massive transfer of resources from the north to the south. The introduction of single fiscal and taxation policies to go with a single currency policy will be inevitable; otherwise, the single currency will simply bust apart. That is sheer logic.

If Britain joins a single currency, it is inevitable that by law we go into something that is "irrevocable". That is the word that the Maastricht treaty uses. It means "for ever", which means that the essence of British democracy—the sovereignty of Parliament and the fact that no Parliament can bind any other Parliament—will be destroyed by the existence of that policy. To argue that somehow there is a remoteness, a separation, between a single currency and deep political matters to do with the federalism of Europe is disingenuous, to say the least.

The question arose in the past few weeks as to whether the British opt-out was foolproof. The House of Commons was at its best when it rumbled the possibility that Britain could be forced into the single currency, or something very similar, through the back door. Anybody who has studied the workings of the European Court and looked at the treaty will know that specific parts of the treaty give the Court total powers, under article 171, to impose fines—the issue in dispute a few days ago—where it considers that countries are operating outside the treaty.

In Roman law—a law that depends largely on political intent and relies on the preambles to the law—it is at least possible that the European Court would be able to argue that if Britain was not complying with the convergence conditions, which it would have to do, even if opted out, it was disobeying the law that had been laid down and should therefore be subject to fines. That was at least a possibility, and the House rumbled that. The matter has now—very satisfactorily, in my view—been delayed for resolution for at least six months. That is the way it should be.

The second obstacle in the way of the Government's proper objective of forming a closely associated group of nation states is the inexorable move of European law. As has been already been mentioned, this is based on certain principles—direct applicability, supremacy of European law, the ability of the Court to make its own laws, and the whole issue of acquis communautaire—most of which the Court has arrogated itself. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said that this was laid down earlier on. It was not. In most cases, the Court has created for itself those important principles. If they are allowed to continue, into what Lord Denning called the tidal rush of European law, swamping our own law, the object of a closely associating group of sovereign nation states will be made impossible.

What do we do about all this? I do not believe that a Conservative Government will ever go into a single currency. I personally wish that they should not, and I wish therefore that they would say so. Failing that, I am personally interested in what has been reported to be going on at the moment in the Cabinet: that a paper is to be produced in the early new year, analysing the position on convergence and the conditions for it. I presume that, if the paper shows that the convergence conditions are not what they are thought to be, and that Britain could not under those circumstances join the single currency, we will say so.

The Conservative party would rally round very quickly if we interpreted that as saying that we will not go into the first wave of the single currency. That is a way through for us. I am very happy that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health—and others like him not noted as Euro-sceptics—is making the running on this matter. It is right that those who are not Euro-sceptics should make the running. I very much hope that they will, and that this matter will be consolidated into the policy that I have just indicated.

There is no question that what ultimately is required is serious amendment to the treaty of Rome. The question is whether that is possible, because it requires unanimity. The answer is possibly, because other countries also require changes to the treaty of Rome. They keep on jumping up and down, saying that they want to abolish the pillars on foreign and defence policy, that they want single borders. All these matters require changes to the treaty of Rome. They are the demanders in the matter.

Therefore, it is possible for the British Government to go with a set of equal demands for changes to the treaty of Rome, and to say, for example, "We will let you have

[Sir Michael Spicer]

your single foreign policy," whether it is to the French, Germans, Italians or whatever, "in return for which we want back our Parliament. We want a clear protection within the treaty that Parliament will be supreme over such matters as defence, foreign policy, the constitution, the economy and our borders." That is a package for which the British Government could ask; others are demanding treaty changes, in return for which we should be allowed treaty changes along the lines that we require.

Failing changes to the treaty of Rome, I submit that all the aspirations for the kind of Europe that we want would come to nought, for the reasons that I have given. If there is an inexorable, unstoppable move towards a federal united states of Europe, which the British people do not want—and what the vast majority of the Conservative party do not want—there will be an unstoppable move towards pressing for a renegotiation of our position with respect to the treaty and to the European Union. We cannot have it both ways. Either we believe in an association of sovereign states, or we accept what is really going on. That is the option that faces us, and we had better address it before it is too late and the option no longer exists.

8.10 pm

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): There are three big issues facing the European Union: the single currency, defence and enlargement. Before I comment on those, I want to comment on the more general issue, as exemplified by a statement that the Chancellor of the Exchequer made yesterday. He told the House:

"fewer and fewer people on the continent"—

I would prefer to say "in Europe"—

"see economic and monetary union as a tool for political integration."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 1996; Vol. 287, c. 288.]

The Chancellor has not been listening.

As a member of our delegation to the Council of Europe Assembly and the Assembly of the Western European Union for the past four years, I have listened to many Ministers, Prime Ministers and Heads of State, and I have talked with many Members of Parliament from the member countries of the European Union. I do not know whether fewer people are talking about economic and monetary union as a tool for political integration than were talking about it five years ago, but I am absolutely sure that the overwhelming majority of the Governments of the other member countries in the European Union, most of the political parties and probably most Members of Parliament in many of those countries see economic and monetary union as a tool of political integration. That is their aim, and it does us no service to disguise that fact.

We should have the honesty to face the facts. We may disagree about whether political union is a desirable aim, either in the short or the long term, but let us not kid ourselves or the people of this country by pretending that that is not the objective of economic and monetary union. That is the objective.

I can understand the attraction for any Government of a wait-and-see policy on the single currency in the run-up to a general election. However, I can see enough of the outline of this proposal for a single currency to make up my mind that I do not agree with it. I shall not rehearse the details: many of my hon. Friend have made specific points with which I agree.

What we mean by an independent central bank is that it will be independent of political control. Whatever criticisms we may have of the Chancellor's economic policies, the fact is that if we had had a totally independent Bank of England in recent months, we would have had higher interest rates.

I am in favour of a Labour Government having the ability to control interest rates and exchange rates, or at least to affect them. I recognise that, towards the end of the 20th century, there are limits on any Government's freedom of action, whether inside or outside a single currency, but if we are part of the single currency, we will lose all control of interest rates and exchange rates.

The Chancellor is right—although it is misleading—when he says that we would preserve the right to be responsible for taxation. Yes, we would have that right, just as the state of Arkansas, the province of Alberta or the state of Queensland has the right to taxation. There is no argument about that. What we will not have, however, is the ability to make decisions that affect interest rates and exchange rates.

That view is not as extreme as people pretend. If we are outside the single currency, we will not have complete freedom. If we are inside the single currency, we will not have total influence. We must decide whether we want some influence and very little freedom inside a single currency, or some freedom and very little influence outside it. I would choose freedom—not freedom for myself, but for a Labour Government to make decisions that affect the important aspects of economic policy.

On defence, there is no difference between the political parties, and very little dissent in the House. I think that we are all agreed—I have not heard anyone disagree—that defence should remain a national responsibility. That is expressed through our existing alliances in NATO and, more relevant in this context, in Western European Union.

I totally disagree with Ministers who say that the Labour party's position—which is identical to that of the Conservative party on defence—is responsible for weakening national interests. What is damaging the national interest is the constant reiteration by Ministers that people in other countries, if they only wait, will get an easier time from a Labour Government than they will get from a Conservative Government. That is weakening the national interest.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have made it clear time after time—as we have done in the WEU Assembly—that there is no difference between the main political parties on whether defence is an integral part of the European Union or remains a separate, national responsibility of national Governments who are responsible to national Parliaments, with those national Parliaments coming together to hammer out agreements through the Western European Union Assembly.

Indeed, at the Western European Union Assembly, not only did Conservative and Labour Members agree, when it came to the vote at the special session of that assembly, very few integrationists dissented from the proposal that the agreement of all 10 allied countries must be obtained. As some of us clearly would not agree to defence being part of the European Union, the others must wait and must accept that Britain is an integral part of the alliance. As we were not going to go along with integration into the EU, the most that the others can do is keep alive that dream for the future—and no more than that. If only

Governments, including our own, would listen to the views of the representatives of national Parliaments, we would all get on much better.

The biggest issue of all is enlargement. It is depressing that little reference has been made to enlargement—some of my hon. Friends have mentioned it. Other countries want to join the European Union. Most hon. Members support applications for membership from countries such as Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and many others in central and eastern Europe.

I am worried about one aspect of the matter that has not been mentioned in the debate. In the discussions at the intergovernmental conference, the existing members of the club will take decisions about the future organisation of the European Union, and then say to applicant countries, "You join on these terms. We made up the rules without consulting or involving you, and if you want to join, that is the way it is going to be." That is how it will be not just on the single currency, but on other matters. If people were serious about enlargement, they would involve those countries in the discussions about the future architecture of Europe.

The European Union covers only a part of Europe: it is most of the countries of western Europe. We should recognise that other countries such as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic have an equal right to be involved in discussions, and that we are imposing on them a decision, an agreement and a treaty that has been made by the existing 15 members of the club. That is wrong. If we are serious about equality and the inclusion of those countries, we should include them at this stage.

Many people in the European Union do not want to include those countries, and will put obstacles in the way of enlargement. I have heard members of the European Parliament say that those countries are not ready and should not join in their own interests, because their industry is not yet equipped to cope with competition. The truth of the matter is that their agriculture is well equipped, but people in the existing member states want to keep them out because they are afraid of the competition for agricultural produce.

The most depressing aspect of the debate is the way in which many hon. Members have sought to polarise the argument, and turn it into a choice between integration on the one hand, and isolation on the other hand.

The fact is that many people such as myself, who do not agree with the idea of a single currency or with many other aspects of the European Union, are not isolationists. We reject the description "anti-Europe", and the allegaiton that we are hostile to Europe. There is a third option—co-operation and partnership. Eventually, co-operation and partnership may well lead to integration; the trouble at the moment is that Europe is dominated not by people under 60, as one of my hon. Friends suggested, but by people aged well over 60—people whose minds were set in concrete by the second world war—what several of my hon. Friends have called the "old men of Europe".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

8.20 pm

Sir Timothy Sainsbury (Hove): If the debate has done nothing else, it has reminded the House and, I hope, a wider audience of the extent of the differences of view about Europe on both sides of the House. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis), following the federalist views of the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), stretched the views of the Opposition quite extensively—but, of course, they were not the only ones to do that.

In Dublin, my right hon. Friends will discuss—both formally and informally—many issues relating to European Union activities from which we derive benefit. Issues such as combating international terrorism, drug smuggling and organised crime, and protecting the environment or even endangered species such as migratory birds, will be touched on, but I want to focus on matters in which I was particularly involved during my time as a Minister.

Two issues have an especially serious impact on our economy, and also on our influence in the world. The first has already been mentioned a number of times in the debate. Inward investment is a great British success story, and, if I may say so, a great Conservative success story. Some of us remember the opposition and reservations that Labour Members expressed in the early days of that success; it could be described as scepticism. When we debated the subject last week, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade clearly set out facts and figures showing the scale of our success. Most obvious and impressive was the creation of 800,000 jobs in the United Kingdom since 1979.

The full scale of the benefit that our economy derives from inward investment is often not fully appreciated. Those 800,000 jobs are clearly a big enough achievement in themselves, particularly as many of them are in development areas, but they are only the "direct" jobs. There are also the "indirect" jobs—the jobs that go with the suppliers of businesses that decide to locate here, and with the contractors who build and repair their premises. There is the advantage of the new technology that many inward investors have brought to us—and not only the new technology, but, in many instances, the new managment techniques, such as personnel management skills, that have proved so rewarding to many British businesses. Inward investors have made a major contribution to the raising of performance standards, and to improving the productivity of British industry as a whole.

The best example of that is, I think, the motor industry. In 1979, the Conservative Government inherited a motor industry that appeared to be in terminal decline: if any industry was ever a basket case, that was it. Our industrial relations reforms—again, opposed by the Labour party—opened the door to the inward investment that has transformed the motor industry, which is now one of the most successful and competitive not only in Europe but in the world.

I do not suggest that all that inward investment would disappear if we withdrew from the European Union. What I am saying is that every step that we take away from full and active membership weakens the attraction that the United Kingdom holds for inward investors, especially those—I can say from personal experience of responsibility for promoting inward investment that they constitute the majority—who come here because they want a base in the European Union: a manufacturing plant, perhaps, or a head office.

[Sir Timothy Sainsbury]

I remind the House, however, that those are not the only people who would be discouraged by our drawing back from whole-hearted commitment to the European Union. We would run a much larger risk if we weakened that commitment, and it would not be just a risk to our position as the most successful and the preferred location for inward investment. Every time a multinational company—a company operating in several European countries—had to make decisions such as inward investors make, involving where to site the plant to manufacture a new model, where to use new technology and where to develop new techniques, it would make the same assessment as those inward investors. In today's fast-moving industrial and commercial world, such decisions need to be made very frequently.

Many constituencies have inward investors. Surprisingly, my constituency has a major investor from Japan and another from the United States, but almost every constituency has employers who might relocate jobs elsewhere in the European Union if they felt that our commitment and involvement in the Union was diminishing or at risk. Those employers are the multinational companies, with plants in more than one state in the Union. We are fooling ourselves if we believe that withdrawing from active participation and full membership of the European Union would not dramatically affect our country's economic prospects. It would damage employment immediately, and would continue to damage it for a long time. We would put literally millions of jobs at risk—a risk that we should neither take nor underestimate.

A second issue that is of vital interest to our economy is one that frequently took me to Brussels during my ministerial career. I refer to international trade negotiations. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary pointed out, we do not just have a single market from which we have removed all internal tariff barriers, as well as non-tariff barriers; we also have a single market that is open to the outside world. It is not "fortress Europe", but a single market with very low tariff barriers and the minimum of obstacles to trade from outside. That is greatly in our interest, given that we are a major trading nation—indeed, by some measures the major trading nation.

We have succeeded in rejecting protectionism, not just for ourselves—we could always have done that—but for the whole European Union, the world's largest trading bloc and our major trading partner. That is an outstanding example of Britain's success in influencing the Union in the British national interest. Negotiations to that end were not always easy. I recall that, on more than one occasion, it was 11 against one: the French were isolated. But we succeeded in persuading the European Union—our partners—to reject protectionism, and that led eventually to a pretty satisfactory settlement in Marrakesh which, in turn, led to the creation of the World Trade Organisation.

Our committed membership of the European Union has given us a strong voice in world trade negotiations. Only three parties matter in those negotiations: the European Union, Japan and the United States of America. If we were not playing an active part in the European Union, our voice would be small, single and largely neglected. We are not eligible to join other groups, whether it be Cairns or the Association of South-East Asian Nations. People who think that we could succeed in those negotiations outside the European Union are deluding themselves.

Therefore, for trade, for inward investment and for so many other reasons, our membership is overwhelmingly in the national interest, but we shall not gain membership's full benefits if we stay on the EU's sidelines. We must show a willingness and a commitment to play a full and constructive part in the EU's affairs if we are to gain those benefits. If we do that, however, we shall continue to see the economic benefits. They will continue to grow. I therefore urge my right hon. Friends to negotiate with that end in mind, because it is jobs and our economy that are at stake.

8.30 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): I entirely agree with the right hon. Member for Hove (Sir T. Sainsbury). It would be economic lunacy for us to contemplate the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. Many Conservative Members still seem to contemplate that, but they remind me in many ways of the famous weather report that said, "Fog in channel—continent cut off." They believe somehow that we could survive on our own, and that, by our leaving the EU, the EU would be the loser. That is not so, and more people are prepared to say that in the EU.

The right hon. Gentleman made great play about inward investment. Forty per cent. of inward investment into Europe comes into the United Kingdom—Ministers keep bragging about it—but I remind him that the statistics show that it was also 40 per cent. during the Attlee Governments of 1945 to 1951. He should also remember that, for every one pound of inward investment into Britain, there is £3 of outward investment. Where is that going? It is setting up competition elsewhere, so the Government should be careful before they start bragging about that set of statistics.

The Government should be worried about another statistic. Britain is bottom of the European league in terms of the percentage of gross domestic product we spend on investment. They should be concerned about that statistic, but undoubtedly they are not.

It was an amazing scene yesterday when the Chancellor of the Exchequer was at the Dispatch Box. It was the political equivalent of Landseer's "The Stag at Bay". I know that he is a rather portly stag, but rabid hounds were all around him—well, they were not all around him; they were all behind him.

I do not think anyone who has sat through various big debates in the House can recall quite as bloodthirsty a scene in terms of an attempt being made to rip one of the most senior Ministers to pieces. *[Interruption.]* I take the point. There is something very attractive about the Chancellor. He gives as good as he gets, but it was no stag party that we were watching yesterday.

Of course, the Chancellor found that there was more support for what he was saying from Labour Members than from Conservative Members. I do not suppose that that helped him much. I am sure that he would have preferred us to stand up and start having a go at him. It merely confirms some Conservative Members' suspicions when the Chancellor receives support from Labour Members. In fact, I heard some Conservative Members say to the Chancellor, "Why don't you join the Labour

party?" Our party has been so thoroughly cleansed that it is fit, I am sure, for ex-Conservative Chancellors to join. Who knows, we might yet see him sitting with us, but there it is.

I go along with the Chancellor position's that to wait and see makes sense, which was endorsed by the Labour Front-Bench team, but only if it is a genuine position. Too many Conservative Members are paying lip service to that stand now, but frankly they would be better off being more honest and saying that, whatever the circumstances—convergence criteria or whatever—they do not want, will not go for and will not support the UK joining a single currency.

It is tempting for Labour Members just to sit back and watch the Conservative party rip itself to pieces over the issue, but we should not do that. That would provide short-term political gain for the Labour party, but the issue is far too important. The future of the UK in the EU is far too important for the issue to be left to a vicious dogfight among Conservative Members. We must play our part in the debate, in Parliament and outside.

What is fascinating is that the debate is far more within the parties than between the parties. That point has been made before, but we need to be aware of it. The Conservative party has real problems. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) said that the Labour party has its splits. He is absolutely wrong about that.

In the Conservative party, it seems to be a left-right split. I do not know all the Conservatives on both sides of the argument, but one does not often see or hear anyone who could be described as on the left of the Conservative party bitterly opposing further economic and monetary union. One does not find Euro-sceptics on the left wing of the Conservative party. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps there are one or two. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel) is merely the exception that proves the rule. That is not the position in the Labour party. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) said, effectively the split was more generational than ideological.

I also notice that most of the Euro-sceptics, if not all, are also anti the Prime Minister. They have never really supported him, and they are using this issue as a way of getting at him. That is the way in which I observe the matter. Members can disagree. Increasingly, people outside observe it in that way, too.

Whatever one thinks, the public are seeing not the big issue of Britain's role and future in the European Union being debated, but the governing party ripping itself to pieces. That is looking good for the Labour party, but, as I have said before, we should not allow that to be the only way in which we let the debate proceed. The Labour party must join in.

The differences among Labour Members are not left-right differences or ideological differences, as the differences seem to be among Conservative Members, but genuine differences of opinion. People in the Campaign Group such as my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East and myself disagree with other members of the Campaign Group—which incidentally, for Members who do not know, is laughingly referred to as the hard left group in the parliamentary Labour party—such as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who are also on the left of the Labour party; so ours are differences of opinion. Conservative Members' differences involve ideological thoughts. They might laugh at that, but it is true, and they are destroying their own party. I do not mourn that, but it is worth putting it on the record.

It was disingenuous of the Chancellor to say in his speech that European monetary union will not lead to a political super-state. It might lead to such a state. A single currency will, however, undoubtedly lead to closer political union. The single currency issue is a political issue before it is an economic issue. Any number of Members have said, "Listen to what the politicians are saying in the EU. They are going for a federal Europe"—whatever the definition of federal is—but enough people want a united states of Europe.

I agree with the whole analysis of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who drew attention to precisely that development, but I thoroughly disagree with his conclusion. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East, I want a united states of Europe, so we have an interesting division, even within the borough of Newham, but it is not a left-right issue, as it is on the Conservative Benches.

I want a united states of Europe because that is the most exciting prospect we have. I want a European Government and a European President, and I want them to be based in a European Parliament. We need to do many things to democratise the institutions, but I want those things because it seems that it has been given to this political generation, perhaps uniquely, to reconstruct Europe peacefully for the first time. We must seize that opportunity with both hands.

How could a single currency be so disastrous? How can I believe the tales of woe—told mostly by Conservative Members, but also by one or two Opposition Members—when so many British business men want a single currency? Do they want to destroy their businesses and bankrupt their companies? Why is the Trades Union Congress such an avid supporter of the single currency—because it wants more unemployment in this country? That is absolute nonsense. All those scare stories that are being spread about by the Euro-sceptics do not frighten me, and I do not think that they are frightening the electorate.

I should like the issue to be taken out to the electorate, and, so far as possible, debated dispassionately—rather than allowing it to continue as the basis for a dogfight among Tory Members.

8.39 pm

Mr. Tim Eggar (Enfield, North): I much enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks), but I should tell him that the Olga Korbut award for the perfect Labour somersault will have to go to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), who did it with slightly more panache.

It is with some relief that I can now say publicly what I have long felt privately on European issues. Within the Government, I think that I was unusual, if not unique, in giving no briefings and in joining no factions on European issues. I omitted to do so because I believe that the Conservative party has always been a pragmatic party. On that matter, I agree with the right hon. Member for Ashton–under–Lyne (Mr. Sheldon). Such pragmatism has always been my party's strength, and I believe that we are

[Mr. Tim Eggar]

a pragmatic party or we are nothing. My party has always encompassed a wide range of views, which are strongly and sincerely held, but there has also been a strong culture of tolerance and of courtesy to those with whom we disagree. That approach and that culture have always been to the benefit of our party and of our country.

Almost two years ago, I made a serious misjudgment. I failed to make it sufficiently clear to party managers that I simply could not accept a further erosion of what was then the Government's stance on Europe. Since then, I have seen the salami sliced to a point at which there is simply no sausage left. I feel rather strongly that my tolerance, and my loyalty to the Government and to my party, have been abused by some of my right hon. and hon. Friends. Some have been pursuing a factional agenda with a ruthlessness that would have done credit, in the early 1980s, to the hon. Members for Brent, East and for Newham, North–West.

I do not remember, however, any Labour Front-Bench spokesman being attacked quite so viciously, in public or in private, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has been attacked. For a short time, I was the parliamentary private secretary to Sir Neil Marten. He was an arch-opponent of the European Economic Community, but I have no hesitation in saying that he would have been as shocked and as saddened as I was by yesterday's barracking of my right hon. and learned Friend.

I am sadder, I am wiser, and I blame myself, but we are where we are, and we are about to embark on a critical negotiation at the intergovernmental conference. In any negotiation, it is as well to try to understand the other parties' assumptions. Outside the United Kingdom, within the European Union, most politicians and most voters take it as axiomatic that the European Union is not only a political but an economic union. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary said today, that is, after all, what the treaty of Rome states. Such a union is what we joined, and that is our partners' underlying assumption.

We must also appreciate that the United Kingdom has the most adversarial political system in the European Union. Most politicians in the EU assume that, if they are to be in government, they will be in government as part of a coalition. To most other EU politicians, and to their voters, compromise and negotiation are almost synonymous with the political process. We may not like that point of view, and we may find it alien to the conduct of our political process, but if we fail to appreciate those basic truths, we will not negotiate as effectively as we should.

The single currency is the main issue before us. I do not wish to detain the House with detailed arguments on it, but there are certain basic truths. The first is that the single currency will come. It may not come according to the current time scale, but come it will. We cannot ignore it, and we cannot simply wish it away. My position on the matter is fairly clear. I am predisposed to joining a single currency in the first wave, although, in that, I suspect that I differ from some of my right hon. and hon. Friends. I have read the speeches of my right hon. Friends the Members for Witney (Mr. Hurd) and for Guildford (Mr. Howell), and I completely share their view that we must be actively involved in the negotiations on the single currency because, in or out, we have a huge stake in making it credible.

To the surprise of some of my hon. Friends, I gladly signed the advertisement of the European Movement. I did so, and I have as big a stake as any other hon. Member—if not a bigger one—in ensuring that the convergence criteria are effective in getting right the details of the stability pact. I share the reservation of my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) about the concept of fines in a stability pact; there are very powerful political and economic argument against going down that route. We must be in there arguing, however, because that is the only way in which we can seize the opportunity of furthering our national interest through a stronger Europe.

A rather sad theme has recently emerged in Britain's approach to European Union matters. When we have come across an idea or an argument in the EU that we do not like, we start by ignoring it and pretending that it does not exist. As it gains credibility, we start to mock or abuse it or those who promote it. We react negatively. As the idea or approach becomes even better established, we claim that it will not work in practice. Very often we are right, because the details have not been thought through. The idea or argument may then be improved upon, largely because of our practical, constructive criticism. Instead of welcoming that change in stance, however, we find other practical grounds for opposing it. We then lose credibility, because those grounds are often unfounded, or less than well founded.

Consequently, we find ourselves faced with a very simple choice: do we agree or do we disagree? More often than not, we agree, and we go along with the directive or with the idea. We then end up with an approach that is less beneficial to our national interest than would have been achieved if we had taken a pro-active stance from the very beginning. I think it was Sir Leon Brittan who said some time ago that the United Kingdom would have more influence in the European Union if we only learnt to say, "Yes, but," rather than, "No, unless." The tone matters if we are to do what all of us want to do—to further our national interest in the context of a European union.

I have one final plea to my right hon. and hon. Friends. For goodness' sake give my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friends the Chancellor and the Foreign Secretary the room to negotiate effectively on our behalf. It is a sad criticism of the state of my party on Europe that I have to make that plea, because it should be entirely self-evident.

8.49 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I am pleased to follow the right hon. Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar), whose speech was frank and fair. In a 10-minute speech, it is difficult to do more than paint a broad canvas of one's views, and there will be other occasions for me to develop my ideas.

I see myself as a proud Brit, but I also unashamedly describe myself as a European. The two descriptions are wholly compatible and, indeed, statements of fact. I am therefore pleased to be able to participate in this debate and to say that I support the policy of my party leader, who has effectively set out a modern and realistic approach to what will be the next Government's attitude to the developments of the European Union. Of course, in reality, in supporting my leader—both he and the

Prime Minister might not like what I am about to say—I am more or less supporting the view of the Prime Minister. If we put aside all the relatively detailed differences on the European Union that have been discussed in the past two days, there is general agreement between the occupants of the two Front Benches on the big issues, because there is a real world out there.

Whichever party is in office, it has a duty to be actively involved in the discussions at the intergovernmental conference about the future developments and institutions of the EU and in the debate on the formulation of economic and monetary union. It would be foolhardy in the extreme, not to say a reckless abdication of a British Government's duty, not to be in the discussions on how economic and monetary union should develop. It is the Government's duty to maximise the options of the Government and the British people on whether to enter a monetary union at some stage. It is foolish and reckless to suggest that we should say that we will have nothing to do with discussions on monetary union.

We have had an interesting debate—indeed, one of the best I have attended. I largely agreed with the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor). If we put aside his ritualistic swipe at the social chapter, his comments were realistic and broadly reflected my opinion. I am a European and I believe in the European Union. I do not accept everything and I am cautious about some aspects, but to suggest that we can be anything other than part of the EU is ludicrous.

There is a degree of common sense across the political spectrum. The dangerous division is caused not by the handful of my colleagues who have consistently opposed Britain's membership of the EU, but by the substantial wedge of Conservative Members who snipe at our plenipotentiaries in Brussels, and their discussions at the intergovernmental conference and on monetary union. They are doing great harm to Britain's interests by undermining the views of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister. Of course, the Foreign Secretary skated over that fact—skilfully: I give him full marks for that—but he cannot disguise the fact that he and his colleagues are disadvantaged, and their negotiating position impaired, by the great gulf that exists between Conservative Members.

I described myself earlier as a European. I think that the EU has been good for commerce, has increased job opportunities and is a guarantee for democracy and peace. The latter point should not be dismissed or minimised, and it is one of the reasons why I am keen to see the enlargement of the EU and why I want the IGC to be a success.

There must be agreement at the IGC before we can invite and welcome other countries into the European Union. I am especially keen that the Visegrad countries—Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and, perhaps, Slovakia—should have some reasonable expectation of admission to the European Union in the not too distant future. Other states may join later, but those countries should be in the first tranche. They now have robust democracies—certainly Poland, Hungary, Slovenia and the Czech Republic do—and they are entitled to join a free association of states. We must work towards the goal of finding institutional arrangements to allow those countries early entry, even if they face a long transitional period thereafter.

The Foreign Secretary referred to the fact that the idea of a flexible Europe is canvassed in the documents relating to the IGC. If we are to have enlargement, there will have to be some flexibility. That should be welcomed because, whether we have a Labour or a Conservative Government, the United Kingdom will wish to reserve to itself some matters that are coveted by the Euro-federalists.

A lot of rubbish is spoken about federalists, but I know of very few federalists in the House. The vast majority recognise that the EU is a unique political concept and institution, but there is not a word that describes it adequately. It is nonsense to suggest that, in my lifetime, we will see a United States of Europe comparable to the United States of America. The EU is a unique political animal, and we do not have an appropriate word for it, but there is no substantial party of federalists here who would bring us to some nightmare scenario such as is painted by those who are opposed to working in any way with colleagues and nation states elsewhere in Europe.

The issue of flexibility raises some problems—what might be called a European West Lothian question. If we have extensive flexibility, who is to decide what will be the subject of collective agreement and unanimity, and what will be a matter for the countries that have decided to exercise some flexibility? These are real and difficult questions that we ought to be debating. That European West Lothian question would apply to the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament.

The European Parliament is important, but its power can be exaggerated—by and large, by Members of the European Parliament. I do not set my face against allowing Members of the European Parliament to have more influence or initiative in what is called European legislation but, ultimately, these are matters for nation states to decide. I hesitate to suggest this, but we should examine the concept of a Bundesrat, whereby the Governments of the member states have an assembly. At present, we have permanent representatives in the EU and the Council of Ministers, but we need an assembly where politicians can meet, in public, with *Hansard*, to put the case of the European Governments, as distinct from the European Parliament. That would be worth while and democratic.

I would like to hear the Minister of State's views on the size of the European Parliament if enlargement occurs. The European Parliament is too big as it is, but it is clear that there will be problems if we cap or reduce its size when new members join the EU. What about representation for Luxembourg, for example? The Parliament is too big now, and needs to be capped.

The voting system—or, rather, the lack of one—is ludicrous. We need some parity across the EU, and I favour some proportionality. I believe that we must also look to the future of the Commission and the Council of Ministers. That is why I return to the idea that there should be an assembly where Governments are represented, but it should not be conducted behind closed doors.

I am pleased to have contributed to the debate. It is a pity that the Foreign Secretary is not now in attendance—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

9 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who made some important points about

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

enlargement. Clearly, if the European Union is to be enlarged, the present institutions—including the structural funds—will have to be looked at with great care. We cannot have a parliament with a thousand members, nor can we necessarily have Commissioners from every country. It would be sensible if, at the forthcoming intergovernmental conference, proper priority attention could be devoted to that, as I believe enlargement to be a far more important issue than the single currency.

I wholly and completely support the Government's line on the single currency, and I do so unashamedly and without reservation. It would be ludicrous for one of the major nations of the EU not to be deeply involved in the negotiations that are directed towards the evolution of a single currency. My personal preference is for a common currency, at least to start with. The Prime Minister's advocacy of the hard ecu some years ago had a great deal to commend it, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will be able to devote some attention to this point when he replies to the debate. The whole idea of the hard ecu has been far too quickly abandoned. It would have been much more sensible to work first with a common currency before moving towards a single currency.

I repeat that it is palpably absurd not to be involved in the negotiations, and I deeply deplore and profoundly regret the way in which so many of my colleagues in the Conservative party frankly bayed at the Chancellor yesterday. It was an unprecedented experience, to which many hon. Members from all parties have referred. I felt not only ashamed, but deeply depressed. I still feel deeply depressed, because I was proud—and I am proud—to belong to a party that took our nation into the European Community, as it then was. I had my reservations in the early days, but I strongly supported my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) in his courageous decision.

If I can, in a brief speech, encapsulate it in one sentence, I supported my right hon. Friend's decision for this reason: if I am asked what my identity is—although I have Scottish roots—I say that I am English; if I am asked what my nationality is, I say that I am British; but my continent, my culture and my civilisation are European. We are part of the great tradition of western Christendom in Europe, and for us to cut ourselves off in any way would be quite absurd. I wish that all my colleagues who have their reservations would have the courage and the honesty that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont)—indeed, my oldest friend in the House—showed yesterday when he faced up to the possibility of his views perhaps leading him to conclude that withdrawal was the right course. I believe that he is profoundly wrong, but at least he faced up to that issue.

Many of the so-called Euro-sceptics on the Conservative Benches are Europhobes masquerading as Euro-sceptics. To be honestly sceptical is in many ways to adopt a sensible pose, but to undermine, at every touch and turn, one's Government's attempts to fight for one's country's interests is wrong. It is also tearing apart a party that has always looked beyond these shores.

I hope that Opposition Members will forgive me for making this plea to my right hon. and hon. Friends. I would say to them, "Remember your roots." Remember what the Conservative party is and what it has stood for. Remember that the Conservative party is a national party or it is nothing, but, as Disraeli said in his great speech at Crystal Palace in 1872, I believe, the three great aims of the Tory party were to maintain the institutions of the country, to uphold the empire of England and to elevate the condition of the people. Of course, times have moved on, but he saw this country as part of a great community: the great community of which we are part today is Europe, and that does not involve any negation or surrender of sovereignty in the ultimate sense at all.

In the next century, which will be dominated by China as the greatest and most populous power, with the nations of the Pacific rim controlling economic power to a great degree, if we do not form part of a wider, cohesive and coherent Europe, we shall be selling the pass for future generations. We shall not be honest to those who come after us: we shall be inward looking, introspective and self-destructive. We have to be part—and a constructive part—of our continent, and that is what this is all about. For our party to put itself on the sidelines in these great debates is a political tragedy.

I remember the time when almost all the opposition to Europe came from the other side of the House. I welcome the conversion and the frank and honest answer to my intervention from the shadow Foreign Secretary this afternoon. Yes, he admitted that he had changed his mind. I believe that the change has gone too far and that the ready acceptance of the social chapter and all the other things that are so frequently recited, mantra-like, in this Chamber would do us little good. There are also, of course, deep divisions on the Opposition side of the House.

I welcome the consensus on the general acceptance of Europe, but I want to see the Conservative party in the driving seat. If and when the political pendulum ultimately swings and we find ourselves on the other side of the House at some stage, I still want us to be a coherent and a united party—a party that accepts its European destiny. These have been sad days for the Conservative party, but it is not too late for us to unite behind a policy which, after all, gives nothing away. All it says is that we want to be there, negotiating for our country when these great decisions are taken. That seems to be a sensible policy—a robust policy which not only can but should unite people in all parts of the country and all parts of the House.

It is sad that our Prime Minister, who is an exceptionally skilful negotiator, is going to Dublin tomorrow, together with our right hon. and learned Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, without the vociferously united backing of Conservative Members and, indeed, of Opposition Members too.

Mr. Mackinlay: He has mine.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I am delighted to hear that.

When our Prime Minister goes to any international council with bipartisan support, as we have seen with Northern Ireland and other issues, that strengthens not only his position but his resolve. I hope that it is not too late for this great party of ours to give the Prime Minister and the Government the support that they truly deserve, and for the Government and the Cabinet to adopt a far

more united posture than in recent weeks and to stop leaks and divisive briefings, which have done nothing for the name of British democracy.

9.9 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): To me, the most chilling remarks in this debate came from the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), when he spoke of his dream of a federal united states of Europe. He once dominated a large political empire at the Greater London council. Now he seems to want the power to lie in Brussels or Strasbourg. It is worth asking why he wants it to be anywhere but in the Palace of Westminster.

I would answer the hon. Member for Newham, North–West (Mr. Banks) by saying that both the main parties are coalitions of opinion and always have been. Either we must have coalitions within great political parties or we must have coalitions between them. I believe that it is better to have a coalition within them, and that is how it has normally been.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) referred to the 1975 referendum under the last Labour Government on whether Britain should stay in the European Common Market—I believe that that is how most people thought of it at the time: they thought that it was mainly economic.

Since then, Mr. Delors said, "We are not in business, but in politics." I have been amazed that so many right hon. and hon. Members in this debate have viewed the question of the European currency not as a matter of principle but merely as a balance of economic advantages and disadvantages. Beyond doubt, it is a matter of principle. Whether our country is governed from outside is a constitutional question, and the European currency would undoubtedly affect that.

To illustrate, probably the biggest continuous political issue in the United Kingdom since the second world war has been how to steer the best course between inflation and unemployment. A single European currency means a single European bank and hence a single European rate of interest. A single currency would therefore drastically curtail Britain's control over interest rates, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell) said in an excellent speech yesterday, are particularly important for us because owner-occupation of houses affects so much higher a proportion of people in this country than in continental countries, where a larger proportion of people live in rented houses and flats. Interest rates are hugely important to many of our householders, and the power to control them would pass to unelected foreign bank managers with their own agenda, not answerable to us and, so it seems, hardly answerable to anyone.

All through human history, peoples have cherished their freedom from being ruled from another country. The United States, India, Ireland or—at the time of the second world war—France and Russia, are but a few examples of countries that have been occupied or have been part of an empire controlled from another country. That is why the currency question is not a Mrs. Beeton matter—a mere question of management—but a Joan of Arc issue: an issue of principle.

Sovereignty can mean different things, but basically it has one of two meanings: either it means us being controlled by others or it means others being controlled by us. I do not mind at all whether we have any power over countries such as Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal, but I mind very much indeed whether they have a share in governing us. I am totally against pooling our government with other countries. Our relationship with the European Union should be much more like that of Norway, which has a common market in industrial goods and financial services with the European Union, without the agricultural policy, the fisheries policy or any of the political overtones.

Many right hon. and hon. Members have used words such as "Europhobic". The hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) referred to "Europhobic ideologues" and xenophobia. The hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) talked of the anti-Europeans. The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) spoke of people who do not like foreigners. The right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) referred to anti-Europeans. It is wrong for hon. Members to use such language. I for one have friends in most European countries, probably more so than most people. This is not about whom people like or dislike: it is a question of who rules.

Constitutions must reflect the public will, whether they are political unions or federations. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) said that the European Union was unique, but there are all sorts of federations and unions between countries, provinces and states. Other federations and unions around the world have been crumbling: the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia. In the Commonwealth, there were problems with the Federation of the West Indies and the Central African Federation. There have been provincial problems in Quebec, Kashmir, Nigeria and many other places. Their constitutions, as with the internal constitutions of countries, must reflect the public will, or centrifugal forces will pull them apart.

I doubt whether British people will continue to accept all the European Court rulings. In the debate on Maastricht on 18 December 1991, almost five years ago, I said:

"The European Community, in clasping the member states . . . too closely is planting the seeds of its own destruction . . . It is only a matter of time before small national or nationalist parties spring up in Britain. To occupy their ground and to stop their advance, both the main parties will have to become less Euro-centred and more national again."

I believe that that has begun to happen and that we have not seen the last of it. I continued:

"In the end, I believe that one party or another"—

probably mine—

"will secure a majority in the House on the platform of flouting the European Community, its institutions and its courts. We shall then have a constitutional crisis, and it will be a question of who the army and the police obey. I would rather have a smaller constitutional crisis now than a big one later on."—[*Official Report*, 18 December 1991; Vol. 201, c. 384.]

Nothing has happened in this debate to change any of the views that I have consistently held over 25 years.

Just over 25 years ago, in a debate on the principle of whether this country should join the European Common Market on 28 October 1971, the House resolved by 356 votes to 244

"That this House approves Her Majesty's Government's decision of principle to join the European Communities on the basis of the arrangements which have been negotiated."—[*Official Report*, 28 October 1971; Vol. 823, c. 2217.]

[Mr. Toby Jessel]

Thirty-nine Conservative and Unionist Members of Parliament voted against. Seven are still in the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Sir R. Moate) was one and I am another. Of the other five, one is an Ulster Unionist. That was the view that I held then, and I have held it consistently.

The issue dogged the Parliament of 1970 to 1974 and I am afraid that it has dogged this one, too. There are, rightly, broad ranges of views within both parties, which is only to be expected. Whether or not one is in favour of closer European union is not a matter of party political doctrine. What makes one basically Conservative or basically Labour is one's view on a broad range of economic and other issues such as law and order, the monarchy and defence.

9.19 pm

Ms Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): This has been a good debate, in which many thoughtful and thought-provoking speeches obviously derived from strong and sincerely held convictions were made. I should like to think that the debate will be as fully reported as it deserves to be but, sadly, I fear that it will not be. Press and media interest in our Thursday evening activities on Adjournment motions is depressingly and discouragingly low.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), who is Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation, rightly referred to the importance of scrutiny procedures in the House of Commons. I should like to pay tribute to him and his colleagues on the Select Committee for the work that they do. I know that many of us follow their work closely and find it extremely useful.

I very much agreed, as did other Labour Front Benchers, with the Select Committee's desire for the single currency documents to be fully debated on the Floor of the House. I know that the Committee has frequently been frustrated because its recommendations for debates on the Floor of the House have been ignored by the Government. The incident involving the single currency documents was not a one-off, but the culmination of several examples of the Government ignoring the Select Committee's recommendations.

We are having this debate on a motion for the Adjournment. A couple of weeks ago at business questions, the Leader of the House said that it had been the practice for some years to have such debates on a motion for the Adjournment. His interpretation was slightly imaginative as, two years ago, the Government changed their policy and introduced the Adjournment procedure for such debates. We know that two years ago the Government were so badly divided on such issues that they found it convenient to deal with them in that form.

I agree with the points made about improved scrutiny in the House of Commons. I endorse the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) about the importance of scrutiny work in the European Parliament as well as in the House of Commons. We believe that the two systems can work in a complementary way. We rejoice in the fact that the Labour party fully expects the number of its Members of the European Parliament to be swollen by the election today of the talented and well-respected Richard Corbett in Merseyside West.

In opening the debate, the Foreign Secretary said much with which I agreed. I particularly agreed with what he said about defence co-operation within the European Union and its limits and the need to retain the intergovernmental pillar structure for common foreign and security policy and for justice and home affairs issues.

I was glad that the Foreign Secretary reminded us of some of the history and background of the present situation. He also reminded us, as did many other hon. Members, including my hon. Friends the Members for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) and for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) and the right hon. Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar), that what we joined in the 1970s was not simply an organisation that dealt with free trade but one with certain important political, economic and even social commitments.

In the 1970s the contrast was frequently made between the two choices: belonging to the European Economic Community, which represented some form of deeper co-operation, and belonging to EFTA, which was simply a free trade area. I am rather surprised that Sir James Goldsmith, who was around at the time, seems to be particularly guilty of rewriting history in that respect in the drafting of his referendum question.

Sir Patrick Cormack: He was guilty of rewriting other things as well.

Ms Quin: Indeed. Sir James Goldsmith seems to have conveniently forgotten the terms of the debate that most of us remember being held in the 1970s.

The terms of our entry into the European Economic Community in the 1970s are in danger of being rewritten, and the Government are in danger of rewriting the history of the European social dimension. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) seemed to be particularly guilty in that respect when he talked about the working time directive. I remind him that the legal base for that directive is the Single European Act 1986, which contained health and safety provisions and which was steam-rollered through the House of Commons. It also contained a massive extension of qualified majority voting and it was the responsibility of Baroness Thatcher and her Government. We need to remember these things.

The social opt-out that the Foreign Secretary and others in the Government secured in negotiating the Maastricht treaty does not destroy or nullify previous treaty bases on social policy. It is not a way of getting Britain out of all social obligations; it is a mechanism that allows the other countries to go ahead if they wish to do so. It does not undermine important commitments such as that in article 119 of the treaty of Rome, for example, relating to equal pay of men and women, which has been the basis of helpful European legislation. I stress that there has always been a social dimension.

The social chapter has also been mentioned—in intemperate terms by the Foreign Secretary in particular, who once again called it the "job-destroying social chapter". I am never sure which of the two modest measures—that on works councils or the voluntary agreement on parental leave—is responsible for destroying jobs. It seems to me that both help rather than hinder competitiveness.

I endorse what my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston said about inward investors and why they chose our country. He quoted the example of BMW and I could also cite Siemens and Nissan in my part of the country, for whom the social chapter holds no terrors. Both have identified one of the important reasons why firms locate here: the English language. Not only do we allow access to the European market, which is tremendously important, but we have good links, which in no way I would want to undermine, with the English-speaking world. Those are important assets about which we ought to be pleased.

I agreed with much of the Foreign Secretary's speech, but his attack on Labour for being a pushover and a soft touch in Europe was particularly silly. I cannot think of any Governments in the European Union who unquestioningly sign directives proposed by the European Commission without examining the small print.

Before I entered the House, I was a Member of the European Parliament, which it was not always popular to admit. It was very much concerned with the examination of written texts—directives, draft directives and resolutions. I realised that one has to look at every written line and every clause in a resolution. One has to get down to clause 127(e) and ensure that one is not signing up to something that is not in one's interests. It is simply puerile and insulting to suggest that Labour would act otherwise in that respect.

I accept that there are differences of views on both sides of the House, as the debate has shown, but I must agree with the description of the different nature of divisions given by my hon. Friends the Members for Swansea, East, for Brent, East and for Durham, North (Mr. Radice). As European spokesperson for my party, I visit constituency Labour parties throughout the country, and I am always struck by the depth and extent of the constructive approach to Europe. Labour candidates in the forthcoming general election take a similar approach.

Mr. Donald Anderson: One crucial difference between us is not always mentioned: whereas the shadow Cabinet is united, the Cabinet is fundamentally split.

Ms Quin: Indeed. Yesterday, we witnessed some of the divisions between Ministers, especially when, in his closing speech, the Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury appeared directly to contradict what the Chancellor had said earlier.

Some Conservative Members' speeches showed how worried they are about the bitterness and deep divisions in the Conservative party. The regrettable barracking and heckling of the Chancellor yesterday has been mentioned by many Conservative Members—especially the right hon. Member for Enfield, North and the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack)—in dramatic tones.

Obviously, there is great concern about what happened yesterday and the bitterness that those exchanges revealed. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) mentioned that. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) said that it reminded him of some of the turbulent times that the Labour party experienced in the early 1980s, which tempted me to add that at least we had the good grace to be in opposition during that time of turmoil and not inflict it on the country, as is happening at present.

Sir Patrick Cormack: You were deliberately in opposition, were you?

Mr. Mackinlay: Parties that are divided lose elections.

Ms Quin: We have learnt the lesson of history, as Conservative Members will realise when a Labour Government are elected in May.

Despite those divisions, it is possible, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston said, that the Conservatives will be tempted to adopt a pseudo-patriotism and run an anti-Brussels general election campaign. I hope that they will not, not because I am fearful of that but because it would be a completely discreditable approach. It would work. As evidenced by the debate tonight, it might provoke some Tory pro-Europeans beyond endurance, and it would greatly alarm large sections of British industry, including some of the inward investors to whom reference has been made. That would not work with the British people.

I was heartened to read an opinion poll in *The Daily Telegraph* on 9 December, which showed a 37-point difference in positive support for Labour on the European issue. Whereas Labour apparently lagged 20 percentage points behind the Government on that issue in the 1992 general election campaign, it is now 17 points ahead. It was the biggest change recorded in that opinion poll.

We must not forget that the electorate are concerned about other important political issues. When I take part in European debates in the House and in Committee, sometimes I am half—only half—persuaded by hon. Members such as the hon. Members for Stafford (Mr. Cash) and for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) that the country is up in arms about Europe and is demanding referendums every couple of minutes, yet my constituency mailbag seems to be full of cases about the Child Support Agency, the jobseeker's allowance or education, health and other issues. Fear of crime outweighs fear of Brussels by 1,000:1.

Labour, if in power at the time of the conclusion of the intergovernmental conference, will adopt a constructive approach but will not be a pushover. What will be our priorities? We shall adopt a positive approach to the employment chapter, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston said. When that employment chapter was originally proposed by the Swedish Government, the British Government rubbished it and said that no one else wanted it. Now it appears that the majority of countries want it, and a Labour Government would enable that balance to be tipped decisively. We shall sign the social chapter, partly for the reason that I have given—that the social dimension has been part of the European process from the start. We shall urge the completion of the single market—I welcome what the Foreign Secretary said in that respect—in areas that will be important for British industry, such as telecommunications.

We shall take a constructive approach to environmental policy and to regional policy. We welcome the fact that so many of our local authorities have developed links with Brussels and are making their views felt as well as being the recipients of European regional aid.

[Ms Quin]

We shall take a positive approach to intergovernmental co-operation on the common foreign and security policy. We should particularly like the foreign policy secretariat to analyse and evaluate trends in Europe so that we can get into conflict prevention and perhaps learn some of the lessons of Bosnia and, more recently and tragically, of Rwanda and Zaire.

Next year will be the European year against racism. A Labour Government would do their best to ensure that that was not simply a slogan but involved positive activities and programmes. We are keen that the European Union should work in an open and democratic way and we support various reforms of other Governments in that respect. If the institutions were more open, that would help greatly the cause that we all hold dear—giving the public as much information as possible about what is going on in the European Union.

I endorse the comments made by, among others, my hon. Friends the Members for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) on the importance of enlargement. That issue has tended to be common ground among hon. Members on both sides of the House. It is an exciting prospect and we should try to enthuse the public about it. We are creating a new political, economic and cultural relationship with countries from which we were formerly separated by the iron curtain. That is an important and exciting opportunity that we should work towards.

We are also keen on reforming the common agricultural policy and I pay tribute to the work that the shadow Agriculture Minister has done in producing a document that gives details of the Labour party's approach to reforming the CAP. It also outlines the ideas that we would like to put to the intergovernmental conference. We would try to ensure a much better approach to agriculture in the future. We believe that the CAP should rely less on price support and should not get swallowed by fraud, but should help those in rural areas who need it. It should work much more fairly in terms of world markets and the agricultural needs of developing countries. We also want to reform the common fisheries policy.

The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) talked about the frustration that Britain experienced through not having been a negotiator at the very beginning when the agriculture and, later, the fisheries policies were being decided. I endorse what he said. He made some telling points, which showed how difficult it is to try to reframe the rules if one is not part of the negotiation process from the outset.

Mr. Spearing: We were open to negotiation by the Conservative party and the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) before we joined. Does my hon. Friend agree that, unhappily, despite the known characteristics of fishing as a competitive but hunting economy, the common fisheries policy has been disastrous for almost all concerned and it has not yet been resolved?

Ms Quin: One can make telling criticisms about the common fisheries policy. I tend to support the fish in that battle because they do not have much of an opportunity these days. Fish conservation is certainly vital.

Our constructive programme, which I have explained to the House this evening, is fully in line with the domestic policies that we shall put at the next election. If we argue for high environmental standards at home, we also argue for high environmental standards in the European Union. If we argue for good working conditions at home—as we do—we must argue for good working conditions in European discussions. If we are arguing for decentralisation and greater openness at home, we must also favour a decentralised and open system in the European Union.

With our constructive programme of European policies and its consistency with our domestic policies, we have every confidence that we can convince the electorate that, far from being a sell-out, our European policies are firmly in the interests of the British people and will give them a better deal from their EU membership than the deal given to them through the Government's ineffectiveness and marginalisation. Far from being intimidated by the European issues, we believe that they will be part of a winning platform of ideas that the British people will support.

Yesterday we were struck by the calls from Tory Members for their Chancellor to resign. I conclude by calling on the whole Government to resign—the sooner the better, so that British interests can be properly represented in the European Union.

9.40 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): Tomorrow the European Council will meet in Dublin and discuss the intergovernmental conference, enlargement and a number of other matters relating to the European Union.

As the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) said, we have had an excellent debate today, much of it on monetary union. I know that I will disappoint several of my right hon. and hon. Friends when I tell them that of necessity I must focus on IGC matters. For a junior Foreign Office Minister to wander around the economic and monetary union debate is probably sufficiently hazardous to health to warrant a European directive against it.

I shall comment briefly on the excellent contributions to the debate. I was impressed by the powerful arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) on a hard ECU. I was much taken with the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Sir T. Higgins) on the difficulties engendered by EMU. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor answered questions on that in yesterday's debate.

I was extremely impressed by the persuasive and forceful exposition from my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), who put the Government position and the reasons for the Government position in pursuit of the national interest as well as anyone could. I remind all those who spoke on the matter that the Chancellor said that the assessment of the national interest takes into account not just economic but constitutional matters, as all Conservative Members recognise.

Throughout the debate today and yesterday, I have been amazed by the hypocrisy of the Labour party, which voted against the EMU opt-out in the Maastricht treaty and since then has been hiding behind it. That sheds light on Labour's policies.

The Dublin discussions will engage on different visions of the future of Europe encompassed in the Irish presidency document on the IGC, which is tagged for today's debate. There can be no doubt that the debate is fundamental to the future of this country, the new democracies and the whole of Europe.

On one side is the centralising federalist vision, which seeks to arrogate power away from the nation state to the institutions of the union; which insists that, in the jargon, wider must mean deeper; which has led to a progressive loss of faith in the union by the peoples of the union. We reject that vision.

The British vision was set out in the White Paper, "A Partnership of Nations", presented to the House by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary. Britain's agenda for Europe concentrates on the real issues—job creation through competitiveness, encouraging enterprise, scrapping unnecessary regulations and making an effective effort to tackle the fraud and waste that damage public respect for the union. It concentrates on enhancing Europe's internal and external security through practical measures, rather than through doctrinal Euro-theology.

The key challenge facing the union is enlargement. It is probably the most important vocation for the EU in this half of the century. We have to do a great deal to prepare the Union for enlargement. That is, in part, what the intergovernmental conference is about: creating a Union that is capable of meeting the challenges of the accession of up to 13 new countries. However, the IGC will not be enough—arguably, it may not even be the most important issue in the context of enlargement. We shall also need policy reform—particularly of the common agricultural policy and the structural funds. I suspect that that will prove at least as difficult to conclude as the IGC, but just as important. Candidate countries also have much to do to prepare for accession.

Sir Roger Moate (Faversham): My hon. Friend mentioned the difficulty of securing agricultural reform and the way that enlargement makes it fundamentally necessary. What is the mechanism for securing progress on reform of the common agricultural policy, as there seems to be a distinct lack of will in Europe to make any progress in that area?

Mr. Davis: The principal recipients will oppose reform. One of the important primary driving agents will be the timetable for the general agreement on tariffs and trade reforms at the turn of the century. The issue will be addressed in the next few years.

We need a flexible Europe that builds on intergovernmental structures instead of trying to dismantle them. We need a European Union that recognises that the structures that work well for a single market would not work for foreign security policy or for a number of other policies. The Prime Minister pioneered the concept of flexibility in his speech in Leiden more than two years ago—a proactive action which I am sure would please my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar). Since then, others have taken up the idea.

We do not agree with all subsequent proposals. Indeed, I am reminded of Ernest Bevin's comment:

"If you open that Pandora's box, you never know what Trojan horses will jump out."

While I would not quite describe the Franco-German proposals as a Trojan horse, they clearly have a different aim from ours. Our view is straightforward: the Union has already developed flexibility in important areas, such as the social protocol, to which I shall return in a moment; the EMU, where Britain can exercise its opt out; and defence, where we are part of the inner majority and others are more reticent about their commitments.

We are faced with a choice that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) mentioned in his speech, which I enjoyed. We must choose either to introduce new treaty clauses to facilitate flexibility or to continue with ad hoc arrangements. If flexibility is not to prove divisive or to undermine the achievements that it is designed to accommodate, any new treaty language must be very clear. In the jargon that my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor have developed between them, it must be cast-iron and copper-bottomed.

If others wish to co-operate together outside the institutions—as with the Schengen agreement—that is fine. However, if a small group is to use the institutions and the budget—which are the common property of all member states—all should have a say about how it should be done. The United Kingdom will not allow others to use flexibility to circumvent the veto by the back door. Flexibility should not allow countries to form exclusive inner groups—arrangements should be open to all—and, importantly, it must not compel countries to join groups, even over time. In the jargon, the model is multi-track, not merely multi-speed.

I turn now to the IGC negotiations, and particularly the Irish presidency document outlining the options facing the Union. Over the years, many game-playing analogies have been drawn regarding the negotiation process in the IGC—some have likened it to poker and some to a 15-dimensional game of skill. In truth, its rules fall somewhere between chess and rugby league. To follow the chess analogy, the European Council tomorrow marks the mid-game of the IGC: it is complex and there are many tactical threads that make exact prediction difficult. However, we can see some clear lines developing.

A degree of consensus has grown around some major issues that we have championed. The hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) raised the question of national Parliaments. In the spirit of Christmas, I thank him and the European Legislation Committee for their good work in that area. One of the Government's main objectives at the IGC is to reinforce the role of national Parliaments, which are the source of the Union's democratic legitimacy. I will not outline again the details of those proposals, but I am confident that that section of the British proposal will form part of the revised treaty in June.

Britain also has a proposal for regular Council reports on the second and third pillars, which we shall pursue in the next few months.

Similarly, we have long argued for the entrenchment of subsidiarity in the treaty. Since the birth of article 3b at Maastricht, the principle has started to work. We want it to work better, and that is why we want to put a protocol into the treaty. I am confident that such a protocol will be attached to the treaty next June.

On common foreign and security policy, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary laid out our proposals in some detail. They have attracted a great deal

[Mr. Davis]

of support. It is not quite unanimous. There is still some discussion to go, but proposals for improving the operation of CFSP are broadly accepted. Discussions are still under way about how we make decisions on CFSP. We regard unanimity as the only realistic basis for decision making in important policy.

Mr. Spearing: The Minister said "unanimity". In the draft treaty, it says unanimity as to permission for action. Do the Government believe that unanimity goes beyond that in terms of execution, particularly on matters such as rules of engagement, if peacekeeping gets hot?

Mr. Davis: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not get too drawn into what is still a hot negotiation, to use his term, but our position is fairly clear. The point of unanimity at the start of any policy discussion is that it gives the leverage required for the next step.

As for the so-called third pillar—justice and home affairs—we have argued, and will continue to argue, for the improved co-operation in the fight against drugs and international crime. The federalists—the centralisers—wanted to communitise some of these areas, arguing that the third pillar has not worked. That is simply not true. It is new, and much has been achieved in practical terms since its inception. There have been seven major conventions, three protocols and much useful co-operation between national law enforcement agencies.

To give an example, in 1995, Europol dealt with nearly 1,500 requests for information, and its action led to arrests and seizures in crimes as diverse as immigrant smuggling and drug trafficking. There is still scope for streamlining decision-making procedures in this area, but it must remain firmly intergovernmental.

Communitisation would not save a single life. Nor would it stop a single drugs trafficker. It would complicate and probably delay practical progress. How can it help the people of Europe to have every bogus asylum seeker thinking that he or she can appeal to the European Court of Justice? How does it improve the acceptability of those policies to give the Commission the monopoly of initiative in them? It cannot, of course. We must concentrate on the substance of third pillar co-operation; on practical improvements, not institutional change. Only in that way can we deliver results for the people of Europe.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) raised some interesting points on employment, because the document contains a proposal for a chapter on employment. Some try to accuse the British Government of failing to pay proper regard to the importance of employment because we oppose treaty changes to bring in an employment chapter. Ironically, those same people are among those who want to impose the job-destroying social chapter on Britain.

The United Kingdom has an outstanding record in Europe on creating jobs, a point made by my right hon. Friends the Members for Wokingham and, indeed, for Hove (Sir T. Sainsbury) in his excellent speech. Since 1979, the United Kingdom has created as many jobs in the private sector as the whole of the rest of the European Union. That is no accident. It comes from an approach based on free trade and competition, reform of inflexible labour market regulations, reduction of non-wage costs, investment in skills and sound macro-economic policies.

That is also one reason why Britain is successful at attracting overseas investment. Britain accounts for a massively disproportionate share of inward investment in the European Union. We are also the number one destination for German overseas investment. We heard the point of view, represented by the Labour party, of one German business man. It might be a little more representative if I quote the president of the German equivalent of the CBI, Mr. Henkel, who has drawn attention on more than one occasion to the British Government's record—our success in dealing with unemployment, in reducing state interference, in privatisation, in reducing the state share of national income and in the low taxation of profits. He said:

"Great Britain has become the most attractive location for investment in Europe. Although the German market is twice as large as the British, since 1985 foreigners have invested 10 times as much in Britain as in Germany."

The Government prefer to let results speak for themselves, but we are prepared to listen to the views of others. I listened very carefully to a speech on Europe that the French Prime Minister Alain Juppé made in the Assemblée Nationale at the end of November. He said:

"The spectacular results which the UK has obtained on employment are less the result of changes in her exchange rate. . . than of the structural reforms undertaken over the last 15 years."

If one knew as much as one ought about the French tradition in these matters, one would know that that was an outstanding statement, and a compliment to our policies.

The results that Mr. Juppé was referring to were not achieved by writing empty words into the European treaty. Fine words in the treaty will not create a single job. Businesses create jobs. They would be able to create more of them if they were left to get on with it without bright new initiatives from Brussels.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield pointed out, earlier this year the United Kingdom Government lost their case in the European Court against the application of the working time directive—the so-called 48-hour week. The directive was brought under article 118A, the health and safety article.

It is difficult to compare health and safety statistics between countries, because there are different definitions, and some countries are slow to produce the figures, but it is possible to make the important comparison of fatal accidents at work, which are measured in deaths per 100,000 employees. The latest comparisons show that the United Kingdom has about 1.4 deaths per 100,000 employees, whereas Germany has twice that number, France has three times and Spain has six times that number.

Britain can easily show that it takes safety at work at least as seriously as any other country in Europe. Any attempt by anybody else to change our laws had better be pretty well argued.

What does the European Court judgment say? In effect, it says that so-called health and safety legislation does not have to be based on scientific evidence. That is an open door to all those in Europe who would wrap labour law in bogus health and safety clothes, and who seek to impose competitive burdens on our industry, big or small. That is why we are demanding that the directive be disapplied to the United Kingdom, and even more important, that the loophole in our opt-out be shut once and for all.

The next six months—from Dublin to Amsterdam—will see some of the most important negotiations on the future of Europe since the treaty of Rome. Amsterdam will decide whether Europe stays a partnership of free nations, as we advocate, or whether a core group pushes ahead to further political union. The question for the British people will be who they can trust to stand up for Britain at Amsterdam.

The Government will continue arguing for a strong Europe that remains a Europe of nation states. We have shown that we are prepared to stand alone in defending Britain's interest, and have fought for our opt-outs. The Prime Minister has made it clear that if the rest of Europe goes federal, Britain under the Conservatives will not follow.

It is crystal clear why this country needs a Conservative Government fighting hard in the IGC for Britain's national interests. People should be in no doubt what the election of a Labour Government would mean. If there were a general election on 1 May, within six weeks there would be a summit at Amsterdam to finalise the new treaty. If there were a Labour Government, in those six weeks there would be a sell-out of Britain, and 17 years of Conservative achievement would be wiped out at a stroke.

Labour would unconditionally surrender the British veto in four important areas: regional, industrial, social and environmental policy. Labour would sign up to the madness of the social chapter and accept the working time directive, which would be a disaster for the British economy. Labour would back a new treaty chapter on employment, thus opening the door to more interference and regulation from Brussels. Labour would support an increase in the powers of the European Parliament at the expense of the House of Commons.

All that would be the consequence of the Labour Leader's fear of "being isolated" in Europe—a six-week sell-out; a six-week surrender.

The Labour party has no principle in European politics, other than the dubious principle of not being isolated. It stands for nothing—and those who stand for nothing will fall for anything. That is why, when we count what is at stake in Amsterdam, British people will decide that they cannot risk a Labour Government.

The federalists think that, if Europe does not go somewhere it will go nowhere, and that if it does not integrate it will disintegrate. That is the line that Labour is falling for. That is why we hear endlessly about catching buses, riding trains and missing boats: those are metaphors designed to serve a misconception. Unless we like the destination, we will not buy the ticket. The Labour party, however—

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

M20 (Widening)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth.]*

10 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): The M20 motorway is the main motorway route to the channel tunnel, and therefore to the rest of Europe. Junction 3, at Wrotham in my constituency, is the point at which the two major motorway arms funnel traffic from the rest of England—and therefore from Britain—through to the channel tunnel, along the final section of the M20 through Kent.

The first stream of the motorway comes from the M20, taking traffic from the north of London and East Anglia, and the second stream takes traffic from the M26 spur off the M25, from the south of London and the west of the country. From junction 3 to the east was always going to be an extremely heavily used section of motorway, and for that reason—this was relatively unusual at the time when this section of the motorway was built; it was opened in December 1971—it was built to three lanes in each direction.

Then, in the 1980s, along came the channel tunnel—or, rather along came the channel tunnel again. The channel tunnel project had been signed and sealed under a Conservative Government in the early 1970s, only to be scrapped by a Labour Government in 1975—a decision that seemed extremely short-sighted at the time, and looks even more short-sighted with the benefit of hindsight.

By the late 1980s, it was clear that this section of the motorway, with the channel tunnel then being built, simply would not be able to meet the volume of traffic that would be taken on it. On 18 May 1989, the then Secretary of State for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon), announced in his White Paper "Roads for Prosperity" that the motorway would be widened to four lanes in each direction between junctions 3 and 5.

I might say to my hon. Friend the Minister that I have kept our right hon. Friend's White Paper, and also the statement that he made on 18 May 1989 in introducing it. It seems to me that the case he advanced about the inextricable link in this country between prosperity and a decently functioning road system holds good today.

Following the announcement that that section of the M20 would be widened to four lanes in each direction, there ensued what I can only describe as an extraordinarily unhappy saga for my constituents.

The immediate effect of announcing the widening of that section of the M20 was to create a swathe of blight along both sides of it. That resulted in some 300 houses having to be compulsorily acquired under statutory blight purchase procedures.

It turned out subsequently that virtually none of those houses was going to be required for the widened motorway. That meant that some £30 million of taxpayers' money was unnecessarily expended on the purchase of those properties, and that the lives of several hundred of my constituents were made a misery as a result of secondary blight. The standard of the estates of people with houses immediately adjacent to the statutory blight deteriorated as houses were kept empty. Some unsuitable

[Sir John Stanley]

tenants moved into properties. There was vandalism, and so on. I was obliged to refer the whole matter to the Comptroller and Auditor General for a formal investigation by the National Audit Office.

Amid all the difficulties for my constituents, the statutory procedures continued. There was a long public consultation exercise, an exhibition showing how the widening scheme would take place, a full-scale public inquiry and a final definition of the scheme. A detailed noise mitigation programme was built into the scheme. Everything was finalised and ready to go. Then, a fortnight ago, on 26 November, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport delivered what was in our area a killer blow to the scheme, announcing that it would be abandoned altogether.

The deeply unhappy history of the past seven and a half years is that, since the widening was announced, some tens of millions of pounds of public money has gone down the drain and the lives of many hundreds of my constituents have been made difficult and in some cases miserable as a result of secondary blight. Heaven knows how many tens of thousands of man hours worked by civil servants, local government and housing officers have been devoted to progressing the widening scheme, apart from the enormous involvement by probably thousands of my constituents in their representations on it.

Seven and a half years after the scheme was announced, they have ended up with absolutely nothing, and the whole thing has been a total waste of time and money. My hon. Friend the Minister and I are familiar with the expression, "It's a funny way to run a railway." I can say only that it is a funny way to run a road programme.

I am aware that the Labour and Liberal parties have consistently opposed a decent road programme in Britain, although, on this issue, the Liberals tend to face both ways at once. Locally, they advocate road and village bypass schemes, but nationally they oppose such schemes. It is a matter of great regret and considerable concern that the Government appear to have largely followed the direction of the Opposition parties. I have considerable anxieties and doubts as to whether that is the right course.

I may now be in a very small minority in the House, but I believe that a proper functioning main road system is part of the essential economic lifeblood of Britain. With its small land area and huge range of businesses and economic activity, it will never be economic to shift goods transported in Britain from road to rail. For the great majority of goods, that will never be an economic proposition.

I believe that it is absolutely essential for our competitiveness, for our prosperity, and therefore for our job prospects, that we continue to have a properly functioning motorway system. The Government should consider very carefully the long-term implications of their policy—the impact of which has been felt by those who live between junctions 3 and 5 of the M20.

I was very struck by an article that appeared in the 8 December 1996 issue of *The Sunday Times*, headed "Warning: 20 years of gridlock ahead as new roads are axed". The article contained two diagrams of England and Wales. One was headed "Motorway Congestion Now", and the other "And in 2015". Each contained black spots in places where traffic grinds to a halt on more than half the days in a year. The first diagram, on current traffic congestion, showed that there were 21 black spots, whereas the diagram for 2015 showed 86 black spots. Based on that forecast, in less than 20 years such areas will quadruple.

I was not surprised to see that a black spot had been placed on precisely the part of the motorway that we are debating tonight, between junctions 3 and 5 of the M20. If that article represents what is likely to happen to the motorway system, there will have to be a fundamental reconsideration of Government policy.

Where does the current position leave my constituents? It leaves them still facing huge growth in the volume of traffic using that section of the motorway. I have obtained, through parliamentary questions, with the assistance of the Highways Agency, projections for the daily average number of vehicles that will use the M20 between junctions 3 and 5 over the next 20 years if—as is now Government policy—the widening scheme is not implemented.

The figures are set out in *Hansard*, 2 December 1996, column 477, and show that—for the section between junctions 3 and 4 for which a complete set of figures is available—in 1993 there were 66,000 vehicles per day, but that, by 1995, the figure had already risen to 83,100. There were two projections for 2012—a low-growth projection, at 110,000, and a high-growth projection, at 131,000—which effectively show that, according to the Highways Agency's 20-year projections, traffic will double on that section of motorway. I fear that even the high-growth estimate is conservative.

Therefore, my constituents face a serious increase—a doubling—in the volume of traffic using that section of the motorway. Moreover, they also face the loss of the noise mitigation measures that would have been implemented had the widening scheme proceeded. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend, in his reply, will tell me how the noise mitigation measures which were part of the widening scheme can be salvaged from the wreckage of that programme.

I have four specific questions that I wish to put to my hon. Friend: I gave a copy of them to his private office earlier today, so I hope that he will be able to give precise replies.

First, what are his Department's resurfacing plans for the M20 between junctions 3 and 5, and may I have his assurance that the resurfacing materials that will be used, whether porous asphalt or any other material, will be chosen with noise reduction as the top consideration—after, of course, road safety?

Secondly, can my hon. Friend confirm that the legal effect of his written answers to me of 29 November at column 417 and of 10 December at column 103 is that, although the Department of Transport as the highway authority for motorways has a discretionary power under section 282 of the Highways Act 1980 to fund noise barriers on existing motorways—whether constructed before or after 17 October 1969—as a matter of policy it uses that power only in exceptional circumstances for motorways that were constructed before that date? If that is the case, will my hon. Friend consider a change of policy to permit the funding of noise barriers for the M20, given the traffic forecasts and the serious impact that the noise from that motorway is already having on the lives of people who live adjacent to it?

Thirdly, are there any powers under which Kent county council could fund noise barriers along that section of the motorway, on its own or in conjunction with his Department?

Fourthly, I ask my hon. Friend for an assurance that, if Kent county council is able to proceed with a noise mitigation scheme along the section of the motorway between junctions 3 and 5, his Department will give the council all possible assistance, and provide access for the necessary works on the Department's land.

I cannot stress too strongly how deeply I and my constituents feel about the issue. They were told that that section of the M20 was to be widened, and they have suffered blight and ever-increasing noise disturbance. They have devoted time and effort to the public consultation process and to the public inquiry and now they have been told that the whole scheme has been abandoned, even though the volume of traffic will double. I and my constituents insist that noise mitigation measures are preserved, and I look to my hon. Friend to say how that can be achieved.

10.17 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) on securing this debate, and on his strong advocacy of the concerns of his constituents. The proposals to widen the M20 between junctions 3 and 5 entered the road programme with the publication of the White Paper in May 1989, as he reminded the House. Draft side roads orders for the scheme were published, with an environmental statement, in January 1994. The proposals then went to public consultation, and a public inquiry was held in October and November 1994.

Following our review of the roads programme in 1995, the scheme was placed in the longer-term programme, because it was likely to be some time before it could be taken forward. Nevertheless, to remove some uncertainties, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport announced their decision on the scheme on 4 September this year. Because of unresolved issues about noise mitigation, they decided that the draft orders should be withdrawn.

The inquiry, which closed in November 1994, led to the inspectors' report that we received in the middle of January 1995. Normally, we aim to issue a decision within six months, but in this case the inspector's recommendation with regard to the use of porous asphalt required particularly careful consideration because of technical difficulties in applying it to this type of road, made of jointed concrete.

As my right hon. Friend pointed out, following a further review that we had to undertake in the current year, the scheme has been withdrawn from the programme. Schemes which were in the longer-term programme had little chance of coming to fruition within a reasonable time scale. But keeping them in the programme perpetuated uncertainty and the damaging effect of blight on individuals and neighbourhoods. Now that the M20 scheme has been withdrawn, the local planning authority will be notified that the safeguarding which protects the proposed route should be removed from local plans.

At that point, safeguarding is withdrawn, statutory blight disappears and the powers to use section 246(2A) of the Highways Act for discretionary purchase are extinguished. There are a handful of discretionary purchase cases which have been agreed but for which the acquisition has not been completed. In those cases, the Highways Agency will be contacting the applicants to ask whether they wish to continue with the sale. If they do, we will honour the agreements.

My right hon. Friend has pressed me on the need to consider additional noise protection along this section of M20, and in this respect he has raised a number of specific questions. The Department has powers under section 282 of the Highways Act 1980 to provide noise barriers on any land in our ownership. Mitigation proposals for the withdrawn scheme comprised just over three miles of noise barriers. These proposals, and the noise amelioration they offered, applied only to the layout of the scheme, and would not necessarily be effective in reducing noise impact from this existing section of M20. If noise barriers were to be provided, it would be necessary to redesign the scheme from first principles.

As my right hon. Friend knows, the Department is required to provide noise mitigation in circumstances where we act as a developer by building a new road or substantially altering an existing one. We are not obliged to do so to deal with noise levels resulting from increased use of an existing unaltered road. I made it clear in answer to a parliamentary question earlier today that we have, in exceptional circumstances and where funds have been available, exercised a discretionary policy for providing noise barriers on roads last improved before 17 October 1969, but that policy is not applicable in respect of this section of road, which opened to traffic in 1971.

My right hon. Friend also asked whether Kent county council, as a highway authority, has discretionary powers to provide noise mitigation on this section of the M20.

Sir John Stanley: Can my hon. Friend confirm that, in law, he is perfectly able to use his discretionary powers to construct noise barriers on motorways that were built after 17 October 1969, and that it is merely a matter of policy that he does not do so? I asked whether he would consider a change in policy and make an exception in the context of this scheme, given the traffic forecasts and the terrible position in which my constituents have been placed for a considerable period.

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend was entirely right: we have the powers, and it is a matter of policy that we apply them as we do to new roads or substantially improved roads, and not to deal with the problems of increasing traffic on unaltered roads.

Kent county council has discretionary powers under the Highways Act to provide noise mitigation barriers, but only on roads for which it is the highway authority. On the M20, Kent county council acts as our agent. It is open to Kent county council, or indeed any other body, to offer to fund noise barriers on M20. If any such offer were forthcoming, I can assure my right hon. Friend that the Department would not stand in the way of the implementation of such an offer.

Of course, withdrawing the scheme from the roads programme means that, now that resurfacing will not be undertaken as part of the widening works, the M20 junctions 3 to 5 will have to be reinstated into the trunk road major maintenance programme.

My right hon. Friend has asked what steps we are taking to achieve a quieter surface for that section of the M20 when resurfacing needs to take place. First,

[Mr. Watts]

reassessment of the condition of the carriageway will be a necessary part of that process. Depending on what the assessment shows, measures to repair or renew the surface will be proposed. At that time, choices will need to be taken about the materials to be used for the surface. Clearly, treating any noise impact at source is more attractive as an option than trying to contain it through barriers.

The arguments in favour of porous asphalt in these cases are well rehearsed. Where the criteria for porous asphalt are met, we are willing to use it. For example, it is already in use on several sections of the trunk road network, including parts of the M25 and M1, and it will be used on the A34 Newbury bypass.

One also has to recognise, however, that the material has drawbacks. It is much more expensive and less durable than hot-rolled asphalt, therefore requiring more frequent replacement, which causes disruption to traffic. It also requires more frequent salt applications in winter. We need to be sure, therefore, that the benefits of using it in particular circumstances outweigh those disbenefits.

In addition, the material is not technically suitable for all roads, particularly those that carry exceptionally high flows of heavy goods vehicles, or for use as an overlay on jointed concrete roads, where the thickness required to ensure that the joints do not show through in cracks in the main surface can present difficulties,—for example, in maintaining headroom through structures. Typically, it would need 4 in or so of overlay. That was identified as a potential problem in the decision letter on the scheme that has now been abandoned.

As part of a continuing programme of research, we are seeking to tackle those drawbacks, and we are examining other forms of quieter road surface, including thin surfacing. Some of the new thin surface materials are already in use—for example, on the A1 in Cambridgeshire, the A12 in Essex and the M6 in Cumbria. They are being monitored for their performance and durability, especially their retention of skidding resistance.

Other materials are still in the earlier stages of development. Subject to that work proving successful, when this section of the M20 next requires surface maintenance, we will look closely at the materials available that could reduce noise, and at the possibility of using that section of road as part of the further development of those new surfacing techniques.

The proving of them starts at the laboratory level, considering the results of manufacturer's tests. We then use them on relatively short sections of carriageway to see how they stand up. The final development phase is to use them over a considerable stretch of carriageway to find out how they perform in operation in the live circumstances of a major road.

Clearly, when we are trying a material to test its durability and noise-reducing characteristics, it is sensible to choose locations where we have heavy flows of traffic, a great amount of heavy traffic, and where we are aware of problems with noise that cannot be treated using existing techniques.

I can hold out that hope and comfort to my right hon. Friend and his constituents. If we have the opportunity to use that stretch of road to test the durability and effectiveness of one of the new materials when it is time for it to be resurfaced, we will seek to do so.

Naturally, I sympathise with my right hon. Friend's constituents, who have suffered the uncertainty and blight of schemes being developed and then withdrawn, and who have seen the prospect of noise mitigation being provided as part of an improvement scheme, only to disappear with withdrawal of the scheme. If we are able to tackle the problem at source, rather than seeking merely to contain it, it will provide a better solution.

I give my right hon. Friend the undertaking that we will seek every opportunity to do so and therefore to resolve this long-running problem, which he has brought to the House so many timesand so effectively, and with which I have the greatest sympathy.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 13 December 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Knives Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.34 am

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This House has been deeply moved by recent incidents of crime involving knives. The murder of headmaster Philip Lawrence is still in our memories—a mindless act of violence by a young attacker armed with a knife. In October last year, Mr. Lawrence's widow, Frances, wrote in her manifesto for the nation:

"It is shocking to discover how easy it is to acquire battlefield blades which can have no function other than to be flourished by the inadequate and the cowardly."

I share her shock and anger.

There are other incidents that should inspire Parliament to take action. Only this week, the front pages of newspapers have shown the huge machete that was wielded in an attack on small children. The knife used had a 23-in blade, which was wielded as though it was cutting corn, according to an onlooker. It is more shocking to know that such weaponry is easily available and legally sold. With these incidents in mind, I fear that the House could rightly be accused of attempting to shut the stable door after the horse has bolted.

For some years, Labour Members have been trying to persuade the House to legislate against dangerous knives. There have been some changes in the law, but it is too common for people to be carrying knives in public. A survey by the schools health education unit of Exeter university found that one in five secondary school children said that they had recently carried offensive weapons, including knives and guns.

In my constituency, where unemployment and poverty are rife, a number of unarmed people have had appalling injuries inflicted upon them. I am sure that my constituents are looking to this Bill to cut down the number of such cowardly attacks. I want young people to be heroes, to give up their knives and stop the senseless murders and stabbings. Carrying a knife is not for protection or a sign of strength; it is a sign of weakness in people without the courage to take knives off the streets.

The figures for knife crime are alarming. The provisional figures for 1995 show that, in England and Wales, 2,559 people were convicted of carrying an article with a blade or a point in a public place; 3,190 people were prosecuted and convicted of carrying an offensive weapon without reasonable excuse in a public place. In Scotland in 1994, 53 per cent. of homicide victims were killed with a sharp instrument; in 1993, knives were used in 13 per cent. of all incidents of violence.

The carrying of an offensive weapon in a public place is already an offence, but surely that is not enough. We must also tackle supply, by banning the sale of weapons whose only purpose is wounding or killing. The Bill would do just that.

It has taken the Minister a long time to realise that the tide of public opinion has turned against the availability of such weapons. The words used in advertisements to describe knives are astonishing. The names alone betray their purpose: "SAS shoulder holster knife" or "Rambo shortsword". Looking at the mail order catalogues, which are freely available for all to see, would curl even the most stubborn of hairs:

"Terminator Terror Sword . . . monstrous double handed sword . . . absolutely awesome, 56" overall".

Another example tells of

"A commando knife made of carbon fibre, complete with blood channels",

which is described as "an ideal Christmas present". This Christmas, I do not wish to see stockings filled with such weaponry. Such advertisements do more than simply make clear the purpose of such knives: they promote the violent purpose, in print an inch high.

It is not possible for any rational person to condone these advertisements, but the Advertising Standards Authority has said that it has no power to regulate them, except on a voluntary basis. A voluntary system offers no control over the minority of fringe publications which are targeted at people with an obsessive interest in weapons. Such advertisements do not appear in *The Times* or *The Guardian*, which undoubtedly would reject them, even without advice from the ASA or a legal curb on printing them.

The public may not realise that such advertisements are in print, but the fact that they are confined to fringe publications makes the situation worse, not better. Those with a perverted interest in such weapons know where to find such magazines. They are within easy reach, in any high street newsagent.

The people who deal in such weapons are aware that the writing is on the wall. There is little doubt of the purpose of a company called "Battle Orders Ltd."—although, after this Bill is enacted, it will have to change its name to "Standing Orders". The managing director has written in the company's current circular:

"buying now will beat any ban."

I can assure its magazine subscribers that the police will not ignore their efforts to get "tooled up" before the House passes the Bill. I have not introduced it so that readers of the company's magazine, "The Battle Bugle", will be able to buy their Terminator sword or their

"Knife with quick draw holster"

now, and thereby evade the ban.

An example of the shortcomings of the current law was described in last weekend's *Sunday Mail*. It tells of a drug addict who showed Glasgow sheriff George Crozier how he used his knife to slice open a drinks can to prepare his fix. The sheriff let him go free, because the addict said

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that he needed the blade for his drug habit. Apparently his solicitor was able to convince the court that he

"was carrying the knife as a tool of the trade to help him inject drugs".

That account may surprise hon. Members. It certainly surprised the defendant, because he said:

"I thought I was going to jail."

The paper's photograph of the knife shows why we need to change the law. After the Bill is enacted, next year, that man will have to use a hacksaw.

In 1988, my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) tabled amendments to the Criminal Justice Act 1988, which would have banned selling knives to under-16s and references to the offensive or defensive use of knives in their marketing or advertising. The Government opposed both amendments. The present Minister of Agriculture, the right hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) then said:

"It is true that we should tackle the problem of possession in a public place, but it does not follow from that that we should prohibit the sale to under-aged persons".—[*Official Report*, 20 June 1988; Vol. 135, c. 916.]

Although I voted for the amendments tabled by my colleagues and Liberal Members, Conservative Members followed their Minister. Some of them may have been unhappy with the official position, but none felt able to vote with us.

In 1994, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) tabled amendments to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which would have controlled weapon sales by post—but the Minister said that powers already existed to deal with such sales. That has been proven to be untrue, because companies have been able to carry on with those sales. Other amendments would have increased penalties for possession of offensive weapons, but they were voted down by Conservative Members, although Ministers eventually responded by providing an increased penalty for carrying knives, which was passed without a vote.

Last year, there was more progress, in the introduction by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) of the Offensive Weapons Act 1996, which makes carrying a weapon in a public place an arrestable offence. At the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), the Bill was amended in Committee to include a ban on sale to under-16s. On that occasion, the measure was passed without a vote. However, when myhon Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth tabled amendments on Report calling for a ban on advertising and selling such knives, Conservative Members voted them down.

Now, at last, there has been some movement towards a consensus. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have supported my Bill, and I am sure that such co-operation will lead to its speedy passage. No hon. Member who has seen the harm caused by such knives can vote against the Bill with a clear conscience. I challenge any hon. Member who votes against it to look into the eyes of Mrs. Lawrence or of the parents of the children involved in the machete attack and explain their reasons for doing so.

The Home Secretary has now agreed to support a ban on advertising or marketing a knife in a manner that "suggests an aggressive use" for it—a formulation similar to that proposed by the Opposition eight years ago. However, the current situation merits a further step: we must ban the sale of such weapons.

Obviously, if someone can show a lawful purpose for owning a knife, it should not be an offence. I believe that we can get the balance right. Surely everyone must realise that saying that it is a complicated and difficult problem will not wash with the public. Some knife categories are already banned from sale. The Offensive Weapons Act 1959, for example, banned flick knives and gravity knives, and an order was made under section 141 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 to ban other bladed and offensive weapons.

My Bill makes it an offence to market a knife in a manner that

"indicates, or suggests, that it is suitable for combat",

or that makes it

"likely to stimulate or encourage violent behaviour involving the use of the knife as a weapon."

The terms are further defined in clause 1(1). "Suitable for combat" means

"suitable for use as a weapon for inflicting injury on a person or causing a person to fear injury".

"Violent behaviour" means any unlawful act inflicting injury, or causing someone to fear injury. Under clause 1, "marketing a knife" includes selling or hiring a knife, offering one for sale or hire, or possessing one for the purpose of sale or hire.

The Bill covers any name or description on a knife or on any packaging or advertising material relating to it in marketing material that

"indicates, or suggests, that the knife is suitable for combat".

Clause 2 makes it an offence to publish any material to market a knife which

"indicates, or suggests, that the knife is suitable for combat; or . . . is otherwise likely to stimulate or encourage violent behaviour involving the use of the knife as a weapon."

That will deal with injuries such as those that I mentioned earlier.

Clause 3 allows certain exemptions, to avoid catching those who market knives for legitimate purposes, although they are intended for an aggressive use. The exemption includes, for example, knives intended for use by the armed forces, or knives that had an aggressive use when originally made but which are now marketed as collectors' pieces. It will be lawful to market such knives, provided that those marketing them have no reason to suspect that those acquiring them will use them for an unlawful purpose.

It will not be lawful, for example, to market an antique sword in a manner suggesting that it is suitable for combat if there are grounds for believing that the person buying it is likely to use it for such a purpose. The clause provides power for the Secretary of State to exempt other types of marketing.

Clause 4 provides certain defences for people who may be charged with offences under clauses 1 or 2. It would be a defence if a person could prove that he did not know or suspect, and had no reasonable grounds for suspecting, that the way in which a knife was marketed amounted to a suggestion that it was suitable for combat or was likely to stimulate or encourage violent behaviour.

Under clause 4(3), it would be a defence if a person could prove that he took

"all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to avoid committing the offence."

That would provide a possible defence for a shopkeeper, for example, who issued instructions to all his staff not to market knives in an aggressive way, only to discover that one of his staff had flouted those instructions without his knowledge or authority.

Clause 5 provides certain powers for the police. If a police officer has reasonable grounds for suspecting that a person has committed an offence under clause 1 or that the person has in his possession knives that have been marketed unlawfully, the police officer may obtain a warrant to enter and search that person's premises and seize the knives.

The clause provides similar powers under warrant to enter and search premises and to seize publications containing offending material. Any knives or publications seized under the clause may be retained until the conclusion of any proceedings against the person involved.

Clause 6 provides a power of forfeiture for the courts. If a person is convicted of an offence under clauses 1 or 2, the court may order the forfeiture of any offending material that the police have seized using their powers under this clause. The courts have the discretion to order forfeiture but are not required to do so. There may be cases in which the court would consider that requiring the offender to forfeit all his offending knives or publications would be a disproportionate punishment—if, for example, the offence were only of a very marginal kind but forfeiture of all the property would have a very serious effect on that person's livelihood.

Clause 7 deals with the rights of third parties in relation to property that has been seized. The offending knives or publications might have been stolen from their legitimate owner, who might have had no knowledge of the way in which they were being marketed by the offender. In such a case, the rightful owner would be able to apply to the court to have his property restored, and the court would be able to return his property to him if it were satisfied that he had had no part in the offence.

Clause 8 adds to the circumstances in which the police can make use of the existing stop-and-search powers under section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. It allows an officer of superintendent rank or above to authorise officers to stop and search people and vehicles if he has reason to believe that persons in any specific locality in the police area are carrying knives or offensive weapons without good reason. The authorising officer may authorise the use of stop-and-search powers at any specified place within the locality for up to 24 hours.

If the authorising officer has given that permission, police constables will be able to stop and search any pedestrian in the relevant area for knives or offensive weapons and, similarly, to stop and search any vehicle that might be carrying knives or offensive weapons. Authorisations under this clause must be given in writing and specify the locality in which the powers are to be exercised and the period for which they may be exercised. They may be extended for a further 24 hours and may be exercised—as now—by a chief inspector or inspector if no superintendent is available. Subsection (5) extends section 60 of the 1994 Act to Scotland.

Clause 8 entitles a pedestrian who is searched or a driver who is stopped to obtain a written statement saying that he was searched or stopped. Anyone requiring such a written statement must apply for it within a year of the date of the event in question.

Clause 9 deals with relevant offences by corporate bodies. If any offence is committed with the consent or connivance of an officer of a corporate body, or is attributable to any neglect on the part of an officer of a corporate body, that officer and the corporate body itself are guilty of the offence.

The Bill deals with the concerns about which the public have rightfully voiced a strong opinion. Petitions have been presented to hon. Members, and I am sure that I am not alone in having received a number of letters urging the House to legislate against the knives in question.

Not long ago, a representative of the Police Superintendents Association said:

"If they can get a man on the moon, I am sure they can come to a definition of a combat knife."

I believe that the Bill provides such a definition. It is not beyond the wit of reasonable people to tell the difference between a knife designed to cut through bread and one designed to cut through people. The public were not convinced by the Home Secretary's comment that no such distinction was possible.

Such a measure should be adopted by the House—and not before time. I hope that the Conservative Members will not show the worst excesses of political malice, and that a Bill which commands cross-party support and which the general public are willing on can reach the statute book.

In drafting the Bill, I have had the co-operation and support of hon. Members from all parties, for which I am grateful. My hon. Friends the Members for Blackburn and for Cardiff, South and Penarth have pursued this matter for a long time. I must thank the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) for his willingness to help with the Bill on a cross-party basis. I am especially grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), who has been by my side since the day I came first in the ballot. I am grateful for his help; working with him has been a pleasurable experience for me.

I should also like to thank the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor), the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) and my hon. Friends the Members for Preston (Mrs. Wise), for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig), for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams), for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington), for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) and for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham). I must also thank the Minister of State and the Home Secretary for their assistance and guidance.

This has been a great pleasure for me, and I am honoured to be introducing the Bill. Let us pass it into law without delay—that will be a victory for Mrs. Lawrence, and for common sense. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.57 am

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): It gives me great pleasure to support the Bill. I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) who introduced the Bill, which commands the support of all hon. Members, cogently and sincerely. I applaud the

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fact that it is an all-party issue and that we can debate the Bill while essentially backing what the hon. Gentleman said.

It is without doubt worth paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) and, indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), who have also moved the argument forward and brought the matter to the public's attention in a persuasive manner—all those of us interested in the issue applaud what they have done.

There is a slight irony in the fact that, at breakfast this morning, I cut my finger while trying to cut an apple. If my notes are a strange pink colour, it is a reflection of that incident—I have to say that it is the only pink thing about me.

Judging by the standards of most industrialised nations, ours is not essentially a murderous society. Nevertheless, appalling things happen. There was something cathartic about the tragic death of Philip Lawrence that moved public opinion on. The results of that lie in what we are debating this morning.

Philip Lawrence died when his body was pierced by an horrific, 10-in blade. It was a terrible thing for the whole nation that a man of such distinction died in that way. I join the hon. Member for Provan in his tribute to Mr. Lawrence's widow and the way in which she has brought the issue to the public's attention with such dignity. In the past week or two, there has been considerable publicity about a road rage victim, who was also knifed to death in tragic circumstances.

The use of knives as offensive weapons has evolved considerably since the end of the second world war. In the late 1940s, criminal gangs increasingly indulged in knife warfare. The Prevention of Crime Act 1953 was introduced to address the problem. Some of us might recall, even if we were not there at the time, that public attention was particularly moved to seek to address the dangers of carrying knives as offensive weapons by the rise of the teddy boy. They went around with knuckledusters, bicycle chains and flick knives, which were part of their culture. The problem bedevilled British society in the 1950s.

Section 1(1) of the 1953 Act says:

"Any person who without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, the proof whereof shall lie on him, has with him in any public place any offensive weapon shall be guilty of an offence".

That had an important effect. With the growing popularity of flick knives, the Restriction of Offensive Weapons Act 1959 was introduced to address the dangers of knives in society.

Those two Acts undoubtedly had an effect, but they have proved inadequate for the culture of the 1980s and the 1990s, despite the subsequent legislative changes.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): My hon. Friend is making some important points about the changes in legislation so long ago. I support the Bill, as I am sure everyone does, but the problem is to make an effective law that will make a difference. Knuckledusters and flick knives, which my hon. Friend mentioned, are offensive weapons per se, because they can have no other use. Is the problem not the fact that there will be doubts about the purpose of certain knives?

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend makes a fair point about definition, but an element of discretion in the Bill is available on that. We can leave it to the good sense of the courts to make a judgment on what an offensive weapon is when there is a grey area. Undoubtedly, terrible crimes have been committed with knives that are supposedly for domestic use. My hon. Friend has made a good point, but, as the hon. Member for Provan has already mentioned, the knife sub-culture has clearly been enhanced, exaggerated and encouraged by aggressive advertising and packaging. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that we have to clamp down on that.

As in many industrial societies, there is undoubtedly a yob culture in the United Kingdom. We have had waves of disagreeable groups in the past. Teddy boys have been referred to, and we could also mention the violence of the mods and rockers.

This summer, there were scenes of mindless yobbishness in quiet towns in my rural Suffolk constituency. That was largely alcohol-induced, with young people rampaging round the town behaving in what can be described mildly as an anti-social way. Happily, they did not have knives. I am delighted that, with the impending passage of the Crime (Sentences) Bill, many of the problems of that yob culture will be addressed by stiffer penalties and the possibility of publicly naming the young people who offend in that way.

I also welcome the fact that so many local authorities are considering or introducing byelaws to restrict drinking alcohol in public, which so often leads to anti-social activity. I am happy that the knife culture that has caused so much anxiety and distress to many of our fellow citizens in so many parts of the country is not a feature of rural Suffolk, but the underlying yob culture exists not only in urban areas, but has, regrettably, spread into rural areas as well.

The issue is availability. In the past few years, such knives have been marketed aggressively. I am sure that the hon. Member for Provan agrees that the problem is that, in newspapers and on television, we see repeated acts of violence, including murders and knifings. Violence is brought to our screens dramatically. I cannot help but believe that that significantly devalues respect for other people's physical sanctity.

Television presents war, famine and aggression, showing scenes of violence that have a dramatic effect. Who can forget that, during the riots in South Africa some years ago, we saw on television people being knifed to death? Those horrific images have stuck with me. We have to move legislation on to address the culture of our times as best we can. The Bill will do that.

The hon. Member for Provan referred to the names of some of the knives on sale—names such as Rambo and Vindicator. Those names give a false sense of glamour to inculcate a sense of derring-do and adventure in weak-willed people. The tragedy is that such a culture causes death and injury. That is why it is appropriate to have a clear restriction on advertisements for those knives and on the packaging, which is also part of the problem.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Is it not true that those advertisements, which the hon. Member for Provan

also referred to, appeal most to the weak, particularly to the rather pathetic young man who needs to bolster his ego or to prove himself tough? It is particularly pernicious to appeal to the weak, who then part with their money, increasing the number of those unpleasant weapons in circulation.

Mr. Spring: My hon. Friend is right. An inadequate or weak-willed person may gain some sort of strength from carrying such a weapon. It is particularly dangerous when such people are emboldened by a quantity of alcohol. We see all too often the twin effects of alcohol and offensive weapons.

I very much welcome the fact that the police will be able to search shops and seize weapons that fall into the combat category. I welcome the fact that they will be able to seize magazines containing illegal advertisements for knives, because there is no doubt that aggressive advertising encourages aggression itself.

I also welcome the fact that there is a sensible balance. There are exceptions for trade, domestic, artistic and ceremonial use, and for knives that are part of a national costume. That will certainly apply to some hon. Members from north of the border.

I possess two Omani khunjas; I am happy to say that they are framed and behind glass, but they were designed to be lethal weapons. It is part of the culture of the Arabian peninsula to carry such knives. They have an antique and ceremonial value, and I hope that nothing like them will be used in acts of violence in Britain. It is appropriate that such knives should be recognised as antique items and thus exempted. I have seen examples of such knives in various ministerial offices; they are gifts given by foreign Governments. Having looked into the matter, I am not aware that any of those ancient knives has ever been used in an attack in Britain.

There are civil liberties questions about the stop-and-search powers. Mr. Harry Fletcher, the assistant general secretary of the National Association of Probation Officers, said in *The Times* on Wednesday 20 November:

"This draconian measure, if used insensitively, will do nothing but create high levels of conflict between young people and the law."

Mr. John Wadham, the director of Liberty, the civil rights organisation, said in *The Independent* on 20 November:

"This latest proposal is a massive extension of stop-and-search powers. Any young person, any black person, any person with long hair, in fact any person at all, will be subject to random and arbitrary searches by the police."

I very much welcome the increased police powers, and I believe that the community at large will do so. We have gangs who carry knives. At present, areas can be designated only for 24 hours, and then only if that detention has been authorised by a superintendent. The law will now be modified in a way that accords very much with the reality of the situation.

At the heart of our difficulties is the knife culture itself. In that context, I very much welcome the anti-violence campaign which has been launched by the Scottish Office with a budget of £500,000. On 27 November, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced a poster campaign for which the slogan was "Don't carry the risk". That campaign will be carried into schools, youth clubs, police stations and shops.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has talked about the need to sort out the application of the law to schools. It will now be an arrestable offence to carry a knife on school premises, and the police will have search powers in schools. The Department, very appropriately, is preparing guidance for schools, because it is in schools that the fight against the knife culture can be most effectively undertaken. It is excellent to see the co-operation between the Home Office and the Department for Education and Employment, which is intended to ram home the message about knives and to ensure that young people understand the terrible dangers of the knife culture.

It is, however, worth remembering—I alluded to legislation in the 1950s—that, under the Offensive Weapons Act 1996, anyone carrying a knife in public without good reason can receive up to two years' imprisonment. From 1 January 1997, it will be a criminal offence to sell a knife to anybody under the age of 16, with a maximum six-month custodial sentence or a fine. As I said, the co-operation between my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment is crucial in heightening public awareness.

The hon. Member for Provan spoke of the extent of the problem. In 1995, according to the British crime survey, there were 160,000 incidents of wounding and robbery in which a knife was carried—not necessarily used, but carried. Happily, in many parts of Britain, the knife culture has not taken root, but, unhappily, in many others it has. Carrying a knife is dangerous and encourages a false machismo in young people. It is right to attempt to stop the manufacture and sale of knives, because we must destroy the knife culture.

We must address social problems and their expression in criminal activity as they arise. The time has come to stand up and fight the knife culture which has caused such mayhem. Once again, I applaud the efforts of the hon. Member for Provan in introducing the Bill and bringing the matter to public attention. I know that the whole House and the whole nation support him in seeking to stamp out the pernicious knife culture in our society.

10.16 am

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): On 21 March 1993, Police Sergeant Bill Forth was in his panda car on the Clover Hill estate in Sunniside in my constituency. He was dragged from that car, he was clubbed with fence posts, and he was stabbed to death with a sheath knife. The assailants, Paul Weddle and Philip English, were convicted of murder. Their defence counsel pleaded in mitigation the fact that they were high on a mixture of alcohol, solvents and temazepan. It was not, however, the alcohol, solvents and temazepan that killed Sergeant Forth; it was a knife.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) on introducing the Bill; it is an important and overdue measure. We should have had this legislation a long time ago. I also congratulate my hon. Friend on the measured way in which he moved the Bill's Second Reading, and on the thoughtful way in which he has constructed it; it will be effective.

Sergeant Forth was 35; he left a widow, Gill, and two children: Christopher, who was 10 at the time, and Rebecca, who was seven. Weddle and English beat Sergeant Forth with fence posts, and Weddle then stabbed him while English ran off. The police were doing their duty by protecting a family on the estate who were being

[Mr. John McWilliam]

attacked by a group of youths simply because Weddle, who was 25 at the time, had lost his 15-year-old girl friend to a member of that family. Such behaviour is totally unacceptable in a civilised society. It is unacceptable in a civilised society that, in some areas, knives are routinely carried. I particularly welcome the clause that enables the police to confiscate knives and to arrest, detain and search people to find out whether they are carrying them. Our children are entitled to grow up in a safe society, and society will be much safer without knives.

Sergeant Forth died in tragic circumstances, having been congratulated in the High Court only a week before on his bravery in tackling an armed siege. Whatever we do, we cannot give Gill back her husband and the children their father, but we can give them hope that other families will not be devastated in the same way. I commend the Bill to the House.

10.20 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): It might be helpful for me to inform the House at a reasonably early stage in our proceedings that the Government support the Bill. I sincerely congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) on the way he presented the Bill to the House and his full explanation of it. I also thank him for his kindness and courtesy in thanking us for the small amount of assistance that we gave him.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's decision to introduce a Bill on knives. His speech and the two other excellent speeches this morning show that, whenever we can put in place another piece of the jigsaw in helping to destroy the knife sub-culture that involves too many young people by making it difficult for them to carry or use knives, we are doing our duty to society.

We are all united in our objective of tackling the menace of knife-related crime. We have heard a good historical coverage of the changes to the relevant legislation since the 1940s. Over the years, a great deal of work has been done, but I suspect that in future, as in other areas of crime such as those involving drugs or pornography, whenever we think that we have the problem bolted down, the culture, technology and attitudes change and that we have to return to the problem every two or three years to tighten up the legislation.

More can and should be done, and the hon. Gentleman's Bill gives us such an opportunity. Before I turn to it in detail, let me remind the House of some of the measures that we have already taken that set the Bill in context.

Section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 made it an offence for a person to possess a bladed or sharply pointed article in a public place without good reason. The Act places the onus on the person carrying the knife to show that he has a good reason for possessing it in public. There is no need to prove intent to use the knife. That legislation was designed to deal with a weakness in previous legislation, whereby there had to be proof of such an intention. If the prosecution could show such an intention, there were heavy penalties, but the 1988 Act made simple possession without a lawful excuse an offence.

We continually return to the issue. In 1995, my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) sponsored her Offensive Weapons Bill, which received strong support on both sides of the House. I congratulate her on introducing that measure and thank hon. Members for supporting it. On 4 July, it became the Offensive Weapons Act 1996 and it contained four important provisions.

First, the Act raised the maximum penalty for carrying a knife in public without good reason from a fine of £1,000 to two years' imprisonment or an unlimited fine or both. The maximum penalty for the more serious offence of carrying a knife with intent to cause injury was raised from two to four years' imprisonment.

Secondly, the Act gave the police the terribly important power to arrest people on the spot for those offences. Thirdly, the law as it stood meant that an offence of carrying a knife or offensive weapon could only take place in public. The Act extended the scope of the offence to carrying a knife on school premises, together with the necessary police powers of search and entry. Many of us had assumed that school premises were public property, but we discovered that they were not, so the Bill sensibly extended provisions to them.

Fourthly, the Act created a new offence of selling knives or other bladed articles to people under 16. The prohibition on selling knives to under-16s will come into force on 1 January 1997.

We have also used powers under section 141 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 to prohibit the manufacture, sale, importation, giving, hiring or lending of certain specified weapons. An order was made in 1988 prohibiting 14 different weapons that can be defined by their essential features. They include knuckledusters, sword sticks, butterfly knives, hand claws, belt buckle knives and push daggers. Many of those weapons are marketed in foreign magazines although in Britain it is illegal to sell them, buy them or acquire them. The Bill tackles the mere fact of them being described or published, and will do a lot to tackle the knife-carrying sub-culture.

No one should be in any doubt how seriously the law treats illicit knife carrying, but it is clear that, despite the heavy penalties, too many people do not realise that it is an offence to carry a knife in public without good reason, or if they do they are clearly prepared to take the risk.

In 1995, there were almost 3,500 prosecutions for the offence of illicit knife carrying. On 27 November, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary launched a publicity campaign involving the distribution of posters and other material to schools, colleges, local newspapers and radio stations.

During the passage of the Offensive Weapons Act, concern was expressed on both sides of the House about the way in which some knives are advertised. The Advertising Standards Authority conducted a wide-ranging survey of printed advertisements in February. It found that of 259 adverts for weapons and knives, 15 were questionable when judged against the code of advertising practice, which provides that adverts should not contain anything that condones or is likely to provoke violence or antisocial behaviour. As a result of the concern expressed about advertising and marketing, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope) agreed to keep the position under review and study what was happening in the advertising and marketing world.

On 26 June, my hon. Friend met Mrs. Alderton, the Director General of the Advertising Standards Authority. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary had a further meeting with the ASA on 9 November. Mrs. Alderton told him that the authority had been successful in getting 13 out of the 15 unacceptable adverts withdrawn or changed. The other two advertisers could not be contacted, but their adverts had not been published again. Mrs. Alderton agreed that the authority should conduct further surveys frequently and without notice.

Against the background of promising my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam that we would monitor advertising and marketing, we have continued to consider what further steps we can take to deal with the knife-carrying culture. We have made it clear that, if it were possible to define in a satisfactory way knives that had no legitimate purpose, we would not hesitate to use the powers under the Criminal Justice Act 1988 to ban such knives and their marketing in the same way as we have used them to ban 14 other weapons, including knuckledusters, butterfly knives and flick knives.

All the knives that have been banned under the 1988 Act have features that enable them to be defined clearly and easily in the law. So far, we have concluded that we cannot define combat knives satisfactorily and distinguish them from other knives in order to ban them. I understand that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) shares that view. We have therefore considered other approaches. We have given a great deal of thought to how we might produce workable legislation to address the way in which knives are marketed.

That is why we came forward with a proposal that it should be an offence for anyone to market a knife in a way that suggests that it is suitable for combat or otherwise likely to encourage violent behaviour involving the use of a knife. I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Provan has gone down the route of tackling the marketing of knives that in any way suggests that they are suitable for combat. The Bill's proposals will make a significant contribution towards stamping out some of the unpleasant and unacceptable ways in which combat knives are sold and marketed.

I am not 100 per cent. confident that the drafting of clause 1 is quite right. A couple of technical amendments may be required, but we shall look at that closely. If drafting amendments are required, we shall certainly assist the hon. Gentleman in dealing with them quickly in Committee. Apart from that little technical quibble, I welcome the proposals' substance, which we of course support.

I should like briefly to mention the proposals made last week by the Police Superintendents Association of England and Wales. It suggested that it should be an offence to sell or market any knife that is

"apparently designed or made to injure",

and that it would be a defence to prove that the knife had "an accepted usage".

I am grateful to the supers for giving thought to that difficult question and working on it over some considerable time, but I regret that I do not think that their proposal would work. It would require the courts to make very subjective judgments about the apparent design of a knife and it would not be difficult for someone to show that even a vicious combat knife could be used for a legitimate purpose such as chopping food. I think that people would come forward with an awful lot of excuses, claiming that the knife had a legitimate purpose, and a whole new industry would arise out there of people coming up with imaginative, apparently innocent, uses for a Rambo knife, such as for gardening.

The Bill also contains provisions that deal with police powers to stop and search. Here again, the hon. Member for Provan and I share the same objective. For the problem of knife carrying to be tackled effectively, it is essential that the police have adequate powers to stop and search when they have reliable information that people are carrying knives in a particular area. The Bill sensibly contains provisions on stop-and-search powers, which are a fundamental step in the right direction. They extend section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order 1994 Act to Scotland, which the Scottish police associations have supported.

The Bill would also amend section 60 to allow stop-and-search powers to be authorised where a police officer reasonably believes that persons are carrying knives or offensive weapons in any locality in the police area without good reason. Again, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on that; it is all heading in the right direction.

The Bill would limit the exercise of the new stop-and-search powers by requiring authorisation by an officer of superintendent rank or above, and by limiting the period for which that authorisation can be given. I say to some of those organisations, such as Liberty and others, which have said that such a provision would give police constables willy-nilly power to do anything that they liked, that they clearly have not read the Bill. It sensibly extends stop-and-search powers that have three major constraints on them: they cannot be used all over the police area and must be used in a locality; they have to be authorised by a senior officer; and they are limited by time. Those constraints mean that police constables will have their normal stop-and-search powers—and their common law powers in Scotland—but will not be able of their own volition to use the powers unless they are authorised to do so for a defined period by a senior officer.

Before suggesting to the hon. Member for Provan that he may want to consider putting powers in the Bill, I sought the views of the police associations, all of which supported the proposals. The chairman of the Police Federation wrote to me on 2 December and said:

"your specific proposal in relation to section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 regarding the authority level reduced to inspector and the extension from 24 hours to 48 hours are good ones. They will enable the powers under section 60 to be effective and more quickly react to local problems".

The Association of Chief Police Officers similarly expressed unreserved support for the proposals. The views of professionals command respect; they understand the realities of policing. I want to return to the point about authorisation briefly in Committee because I think that further discussion is necessary, but I do not need to go into it on the Floor of the House today.

I am conscious that other hon. Members want to speak. I thank the hon. Member for Provan once again for introducing the measure. I conclude by applauding him for the work that he has done. I am very grateful to him and other Opposition Members for their willingness to work with the Government and the Home Office in producing and speeding through a measure that will have

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a real impact on the marketing and carrying of knives. It sends a clear signal that society will not tolerate knife-related crime and a sends a message to the yobboes that we will give the police and the courts the powers that they need to bear down heavily on perpetrators. I wish the hon. Gentleman all good luck and speed with his Bill, and if my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and I can give him any further assistance, we shall be delighted to do so.

10.35 am

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I am glad that the Minister has responded so positively to the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray). I am experiencing a very strange feeling in this debate. I feel as if I have been travelling for years only to find myself at the same station. I am thankful that, on this occasion at least, more passengers are willing to join me and others who have argued for years that the advertising and sale of combat knives can and must be controlled by law.

The Opposition are pleased that the Government have finally accepted the need to legislate to curb the menace of combat knives, reluctant though they have been to reach such a conclusion. The debate is indeed a triumph for common sense over obstruction and delay and the unacceptable belief that nothing can be done to tackle the real problems faced by our fellow citizens on the streets of this country.

I am tempted towards the hope that even at the eleventh hour of a dying Government, the Conservative party might accept some of the other policies for which we have campaigned, such as speeding up youth justice and nipping things in the bud with young offenders, and providing statutory regulation for the private security industry. Realistically, let us be thankful for small mercies, and hope that the Bill will be law in a matter of weeks, so that an effective means of tackling the knife culture will be on the statute book.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Provan for using the coveted first place in the ballot for private Member's Bills to introduce a measure that the Government should have put on the statute book long ago. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), the shadow Home Secretary, for his personal commitment and refusal to take no for an answer from the Home Secretary. He responded to the challenge, as did the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), who like my hon. Friend was willing to put aside party differences to find an acceptable form of words. The Minister and his officials have also been most helpful in the endeavours of recent weeks to produce a measure behind which we can all put our support.

I also want to put on record our thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor)—who is in the House today—who pushed the issue from the Labour Front Bench as long ago as 1988. I also thank those who have supported me in debates in Committee and on the Floor of the House in our search for legislation on advertising and the sale of knives during the past four or five years. My hon. Friend the Member for Provan asked me to add to the list of sponsors to whom he gave his thanks the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). The hon. Gentleman was not overlooked—it was just easier for me to refer to that beautiful part of north Wales than it was for my hon. Friend. I shall leave it to him to pronounce the names of hon. Members' constituencies north of the border—each to his own expertise.

If one had any doubt about the need for statutory control, one needed only to have listened to the comments on Radio 4 this morning of Mr. Graham Barton, whose company bears the revealing name Battle Orders Ltd., to which my hon. Friend the Member for Provan referred. Mr. Barton showed a total inability to grasp the public abhorrence of the way in which knives are promoted by his company and others like it. Its latest publication displays an inability to grasp the difference between a fish knife and the sort of weapons that it advertises, and goes on to point out:

> "Battle Orders is a business . . . our customers have a right to expect and receive unusual, practical, interesting products and that means knives of all shapes and sizes."

As in a number of other instances, that gentleman is confused about the difference between a right and a privilege. It is the unacceptable pursuit of some aspects of trade that leads to the need to regulate businesses such as his. Parliament has the right to restrict such business activities, and the public have a right to expect us to do so.

Parliament will today make its intentions clear, and I hope that Ministers, the police and the Crown Prosecution Service will ensure that the Bill is used effectively to end the promotion and glorification of the knife culture as soon as the Bill becomes law. Let the CPS in particular understand that the public interest will require the law to be enforced through the courts.

I also wish to thank all those who have given positive help during consultations with Front Benchers and my hon. Friend the Member for Provan in recent weeks, especially the Police Superintendents Association of England and Wales, which has played a positive role without getting involved in the political debate, and Scottish Superintendents Association, which has also taken the trouble to make clear its position on different aspects of the Bill.

Mr. Barton's declared intention to play games with the wording of a company's advertisements and displays will, I believe, be ineffective, because the wording of the Bill allows the courts to use common sense in interpreting the will of Parliament. Let us be clear that it is not a small problem that we are tackling today. I acknowledge that the Bill is not a magic solution to all the problems of violence in modern society, but it is a small—though significant and necessary—step towards tackling a serious problem.

The British crime survey estimates that 350,000 incidents involving knives take place a year—almost 1,000 a day, or a third of a million a year. That statistic is astonishing, and that is why it is so surprising that it has taken so long and needed such explicit and overwhelming public pressure to raise Conservative Members' heads out of the sand and into the light. That fact cannot be ignored in welcoming the Minister's support for the Bill, although I certainly welcome his support.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Provan said, his Bill represents eight years of attempts in the House to tighten controls on the sale and marketing of knives,

during which Ministers have twisted and turned to oppose initiatives from the Opposition to legislate against the carrying, marketing and sale of combat knives. Conservative Members have marched behind Ministers into the Division Lobby while the public have looked on in shock and amazement. If a week is a long time in politics, eight years is a lifetime.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury put forward amendments to the Criminal Justice Act 1988 to limit the advertising of knives and to ban their sale to children. One might think that those suggestions were reasonable enough, yet the Minister of State said that the proposals went too far. I still fail to see how that position could be considered extreme by Conservative Members, and the general public certainly do not see it as extreme. My hon. Friend the Member for Provan gave examples earlier of the type of advertising that those amendments targeted, including the charmless language of the knife retailers, yet the proposals were voted down by the Government.

In 1994, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) tabled a reasoned amendment to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill, with a demand that the Bill include measures to tackle the provision of dangerous weapons, by mail order especially. That also ran into a wall of ill-conceived opposition from Ministers. This year, I tabled an amendment to the Offensive Weapons Bill that called for a ban on advertisements that promote weapons in a way that appears to incite or condone the possession of such an article or weapon for violent purposes.

When we talk about tackling knife culture, we are talking about the whole cycle of violence, central to which is the glorification of combat weapons. That macho culture thrives on war imagery, and both the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) and myself gave graphic examples to the House. Some Conservative Members agreed with us on that amendment. The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) expressed his strong support, and the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam made it clear that she would have liked to accept the amendment, but the Minister would not let her.

During the debate on the amendment, I became engaged in the most astonishing exchange with the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), when he claimed that allowing the advertisement of weapons in a way that incites violence is, somehow, to protect free speech. The mail order traders of instruments of death, who glorify knives openly in magazines a child can buy from a newsagent, were championed by the hon. Gentleman, who wished to defend their right to free speech.

I hope that Ministers do not cave in to such nonsense today as they did by opposing that amendment. The freedom that I wish to champion—as, I hope, do all hon. members—is the freedom to walk the streets safely without fear of attack from an assailant carrying a knife. While we cannot guarantee such freedom, we have a duty and a responsibility to use every power available to us to cut knife crime. I suspect that the hon. Member for Hexham no longer holds that view, and, more importantly, would no longer receive a sympathetic response from a Minister if he were to do so.

As the Minister pointed out, the Bill also includes an extension of section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to allow the carrying of knives in an area to be a specific and explicit trigger for the use of powers given to the police in the Act. We believe that those powers are needed to protect the public and to allow speedy intervention when the lives of members of the public are at risk.

We also believe that those powers need to be exercised with care and discretion. Indeed, the powers given in the Act have been used with care to date and senior officers have been explicit in aspiring to avoid the difficulties that arose from the misuse of powers in the past, such the sus laws, which differed completely from these circumscribed powers.

The price of freedom—and the price of having such powers—is eternal vigilance, and we are keen to get the balance right. That is why we will ensure that there is close monitoring of the use of those powers to protect civil liberties, at the same time as protecting the right of citizens to walk the streets safely and without fear. We will, of course, listen to the Minister's opinions on the matter, but we must be careful not to disturb the cross-party consensus on the Bill and the balance it achieves, while ensuring that the police have the powers they need to tackle the violence on the streets.

The Bill is the culmination of a process that we began in 1988. By giving it speedy passage, we will recognise a victory for those who have long campaigned for effective action to deal with combat knives. The rising wave of public support for a ban, and the massive sympathy with the campaign of Frances Lawrence, have forced the Government to accept our view that strong action must be taken to remove knives from the hands of those who wish to use them to maim and kill. It has been irritating to find interviewers asking whether we are jumping on a bandwagon, because we have pursued the issue quietly in Committee and on the Floor of the House for many years.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Quietly? You?

Mr. Michael: That fact should be acknowledged by Conservative Members who seem to wish to cackle from a sedentary position.

The Home Secretary accused the Opposition, in his comments in the Queen's Speech debate, of engaging in an entirely synthetic fuss about knives. I hope that the change of attitude to the Bill means that he has acknowledged that the debate is far from synthetic, and that the fuss is real and should be ended by the passage of the Bill into law. It is a real debate. It is real to Frances Lawrence, to the families involved in Horrett Campbell's crazed machete attack and to the hundreds of people who are threatened, stabbed and killed every year by people brandishing knives that have been bought freely and easily. Hon. members have only to stroll up to Regent street to gaze at an array of knives in a shop window display. Those knives are not simple tools of legitimate trade. There is no attempt to disguise their purpose; they are not dealt with in back streets, but sit bold as brass in the windows of shops.

The Opposition have set the initiative for legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Provan has placed the Bill before the House and sought cross-party approval when he drew up the Bill. Let us now follow his lead, and speed the Bill into law.

10.48 am

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): I am pleased to join in the welcome that has been given by Members on both sides of the House to the Bill of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray). I agree with the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), that it is important not to damage cross-party consensus on the Bill. I am aware that there is more joy in heaven over one who repenteth, but some of the entirely specious comments of the hon. Gentleman must receive an answer. He has an astonishingly short memory about his party's policy.

As recently as May 1994, his Front-Bench colleague in the other place, Lord McIntosh of Haringey, derided stronger search and stop powers for the police to deal with people carrying knives, which are contained in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, as going:

"well beyond the powers which the police ought to have and need to have in a democratic and free society."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 24 May 1994; Vol. 555, c. 611.]

The Opposition Front-Bench team has made an astonishing conversion as it has realised that its support for single issue lobby groups of the civil liberties movement has become so unpopular.

Mr. Michael: Rather than accept the selective quotations of Conservative central, the hon. Gentleman should read the *Hansards* for the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill debates, where he will find that nothing in that Bill dealt with violence, knives or weapons until Labour Members moved amendments in Committee. If the hon. Gentleman studies the record he will find that we have every reason to be proud. He uses a minor and selective quotation, which is the one element that Conservative central office has circulated to him and his hon. Friends.

Mr. Hawkins: The hon. Gentleman does not deny that the quote is accurate. He will recall that I served on the Committee, as he did. Time after time, throughout 180 hours of debate in Committee, the Government put forward tougher measures that were opposed by Opposition Members. Time after time, the Government have shown their consistent support for tougher law and order measures throughout my time in the House and throughout 17 years of Conservative Government. Only in the past couple of years has the penny dropped with the Opposition parties that the public want tougher law and order measures. Suddenly we have the astonishing conversion. Suddenly Labour Members claim virtue. As always, the Labour party is following its focus groups and what it belatedly realises the public wants, which is what we have been proposing.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): We seem to be quoting *Hansard*. Neither my hon. Friend nor I were in the House in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but does he remember the debate about the SUS laws, to which the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) referred, and how the gentleman from Liberty said that it was appalling that the police should be allowed to stop and search people and to deny them liberty? Is that not what the Labour party said time and again throughout the 1970s and the early 1980s?

Mr. Hawkins: My hon. Friend is right.

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): We do not wish to introduce a discordant element in what has been cross-party support for the Bill but may I remind my hon. Friend that, in Labour local authorities, time and again the police have been denied the opportunity to go into schools to talk about the dangers of knives and antisocial activity? So much, in practice, for Labour's attitude on law and order.

Mr. Hawkins: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We must have no more of such specious humbug in an attempt to rewrite history, particularly from the Opposition Front-Bench team.

I should like to return to the important part of this debate. For years before coming into the House I spoke and campaigned for stronger measures to be taken, particularly in relation to knives. During my years in practice at the Bar, both prosecuting and defending, through the late 1970s and early to mid 1980s, there was a continuing increase, which caused massive problems for the police, in the use of knives and other weapons of violence. I welcome the fact that Bill of the hon. Member for Provan now has cross party support so that at long last a much tougher stance will be taken and the police will have greater powers, particularly to clamp down on such knives.

I particularly welcome the fact that restrictions will be introduced on the advertising and marketing of knives. The hon. Member for Provan may be pleased to know that some of the people involved in the sale of periodicals have responded actively to his Bill. In my post this very morning, I received a letter, which many other hon. Members may also find in their post today, from the group chief executive of WH Smith, Mr. Bill Cockburn. He says that

"there are 77 Buying and Selling titles, such as *Loot* and *Exchange and Mart*, that could be affected by provisions making the aggressive marketing of knives an offence".

He also refers to recent measures in relation to firearms. He points out that 7.5 million customers visit WH Smith's stores every week and that it wishes to comply with all new laws, including this Bill. He stresses that the companies WH Smith and WH Smith News

"have written to the publishers and distributors or all such titles asking them what changes they are likely to make in terms of their editorial for guns and/or knives and what their policy is regarding the acceptance of advertising and the advertising content for guns that are illegal and for combat knives. In addition, the publishers of imported publications have been asked whether these titles will be tailored for the UK market or remain identical to the native edition.

In the light of the replies that we receive, we will be able to judge whether any further action needs to be taken. We are anxious to ensure that consumers can continue to exercise as much choice as possible, however, we are particular concerned that, following the new legislation, everyone operates within both the spirit and the letter of the law."

I am sure that the hon. Member for Provan and all other hon. Members who are interested in this important new Bill will be pleased to find that, even before it becomes law, people are starting to respond to it. That is precisely what will by welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House and it shows the importance of the Bill that it is already influencing not only public attitudes but the behaviour of major commercial concerns in the market.

The way in which these horrendous weapons have been marketed has offended all hon. Members. The hon. Member for Provan rightly referred in detail to the way in which some of the marketing is done, which must

horrify all of us, particularly in terms of the protection of children. All of us who heard during the recent trial the graphic account of the details of the playground attack in the West Midlands will be particularly concerned to ensure that such horrendous weapons can no longer be available.

The Government have already moved considerably in the direction of placing controls on martial arts weapons. I particularly welcome the steps that were taken to ban weapons under the Criminal Justice Act 1988. Knuckle-dusters, sword sticks, weapons sometimes known as hand claws, belt-buckle knives, push daggers and hollow kubotans and other repellent weapons were banned.

The Bill is extremely worthwhile. It has received support from hon. Members on both sides of the House. I hope that it will receive speedy passage through all its legislative stages. I am delighted to congratulate the hon. Member for Provan on assisting the Government's consistent record in seeking to take steps to ban dangerous weapons and to support the police's powers. I welcome the conversion of the Opposition parties to that.

10.57 am

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South–East): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) who has put many hours and much effort into the production of the Bill. We should also give him credit for the fact that he has had to negotiate with Ministers, which is never easy. The Government have a battery of advisers but my hon. Friend can rely only on himself and his colleagues. I acknowledge, however, that the Minister has tried to co-operate with my hon. Friend.

My attention was drawn to this issue after some incidents in Coventry. There were a number of incidents—some of which led to deaths—involving not only knives, but guns. We have, of course, already had the debate on guns. I am trying to illustrate the concerns of the people of Coventry about the lack of control over the sale of knives. After a number of incidents resulting in loss of life, there was a demonstration through the streets by people wanting something to be done about knives. There was also a problem in some nightclubs where people apparently were able to get in to the clubs with weapons, resulting in tragedies.

As a result, the police and the local newspaper organised a voluntary campaign to encourage shopkeepers to check on whether an individual buying a knife was below 17. If he or she was, the shopkeeper would not sell him or her a knife. For the purposes of this debate, we are talking about knives as lethal weapons. More than 12 months ago, I wrote to the Home Secretary regarding the concerns expressed to me on the matter. At that time, he said that not a lot could be done.

Since then, the *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, the police and the public got together to organise a code that illustrates that things can be done if there is the will to do so. The aims of the code were:

"To introduce a voluntary register of weapons sold by any outlet selling knives or other bladed weapons; to adopt and implement a code of practice relating to the sale of knives and other bladed objects; to prevent anyone under the age of 17 from buying knives or other bladed objects unless accompanied by a responsible adult; to increase offenders' fear of detention; to reduce the fear of crime in particular in Coventry; to convince the people of Coventry that the retailers and organisations taking part in this project have a genuine desire to improve community safety."

They outlined the reasons why the campaign was started, and said:

"In recent years there has been a marked increase in the number of offences where or knives or other bladed weapons have been used. Latest figures show that these types of weapons are involved in about one third of all murders in the United Kingdom.

It is a fact that a small section of the community feels it necessary to carry knives as a form of protection. Unfortunately, when alcohol or drugs become part of the equation, terrifying scenarios develop.

After the stabbing to death of two teenagers outside a Coventry nightclub, police in the city and the Evening Telegraph spearheaded a campaign to get off the streets as many of these lethal weapons as possible.

The amnesty resulted in almost 500 daggers, machetes, swords, flick knives, lock knives, butterfly knives, sheath knives and razors being handed in.

This local campaign was followed by a national amnesty after the death in London of head teacher Philip Lawrence, when more than 40,000 knives were surrendered.

Senior police officers stress that every knife taken out of circulation represents a potential tragedy averted.

And the public expects to see firm action in the courts against offenders who blatantly disregard repeated appeals to hand over their lethal weapons.

Knife crime adds to the public's general fear of falling victim to crime, and there is now a groundswell of opinion in Coventry and elsewhere that positive action must be taken to stop people carrying knives, and thereby prevent the disastrous consequences which can result."

The code demonstrates the concerns in Coventry and the initiative shown by local people. The code itself states:

"No person may buy a knife or other bladed object without good reason; identification must be produced by anyone wishing to buy a knife or other bladed object; if a person under 17 years of age wants to buy a knife, he or she must be accompanied by a responsible adult; if a bladed instrument is to be used for sporting, religious or professional activities, a letter of authorisation or support from an organisation or employer should be produced."

This as an illustration of why the Government have been forced to act. The people of Coventry wanted knives to be banned and I welcome the initiative of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan which the public in Coventry and across the country will welcome. I thought that he had reached a consensus among members of all political parties on the Bill, but some Conservative Members have started to attack the integrity of my colleagues.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) started it.

Mr. Cunningham: It is no good the hon. Gentleman trying to heckle. He cannot take it when someone gives it back to him. I hope that Tory Members will put the people first and their pride second, and that they will recognise that this is a serious attempt by Labour to do something about the problem. I equally hope that Tory Members will not start to play their little games in Committee. I for one support the Bill and commend it to the House.

11.5 am

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I welcome the Bill, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) on producing a sensible measure, limited

[Mr. Andrew Robathan]

though it might be. I welcome generally the sense with which he has brought it forward. The hon. Member for Coventry, South–East (Mr. Cunningham) must have been sleeping during the speech of the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), as that is where the party politics started. The hon. Gentleman has tried to score points on a measure that is agreed by everyone here. Obviously, Labour is trying to make political capital out of what should be a sensible, agreed and consensual measure.

Mr. Michael: Will the hon. Gentleman bear it in mind that we have been trying to get such a measure in law for some eight years, but that he and his Conservative colleagues have opposed it? It would be surprising if we were not to remind him and his hon. Friends of that fact.

Mr. Robathan: I will accept what he says if he will read *Hansard* from approximately 1970, because he will find that the position of the Labour party was clear and consistent until recently, when it decided that it should perhaps be more on the side of the police than anti-police.

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend is right to point out that the sordid politics was introduced by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael)this morning, and not by me. The hon. Gentleman boasts about Labour proposals in 1988, but it tabled an amendment on the matter that it failed to vote on, and then voted against the whole Bill.

Mr. Robathan: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's assistance.

I wish to refer to the issue of culture, which has been raised by many hon. Members before. The culture of our society is most important. We shall not be able to prevent young men from carrying knives without introducing the most draconian measures, which no one would wish to see. We must alter our culture, and that is where Mrs. Lawrence's campaign has come from. I am glad to see the hon. Member for Provan nodding, because I think we can agree on this.

A culture of violence has developed—a culture of Rambo and Schwarzenegger films, and others which, luckily, I have not seen and on which I cannot comment in too much detail. These films come on late at night and, if one is not careful, one can end up watching them on television at midnight. Violence has crept into our culture in the past 20 or 30 years, but knife crime is not new. The hon. Member for Coventry, South–East comes from the middle part of Scotland, and I was always told that the gangs in the Gorbals of the 1930s and 1950s used razors.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: I must put the hon. Gentleman right. I mean no disrespect to the people of Glasgow, but I do not come from that city. I come from a place that also had experience of gangs. I was talking specifically about the problems in Coventry, although this is a national problem. I hope that the hon. Gentleman was not sleeping and has been listening.

Mr. Robathan: I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not think that I was trying to slag him off. On this occasion, I was not. I was suggesting that knives are not new. There have been gangs with knives or razors—mods and rockers and teddy boys. Perhaps they were clamped down on more carefully, but more importantly, carrying knives was not the general culture of our young people, but was limited to gangs and certain areas.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth also mentioned war imagery, and he is right. I probably know a little more about that then most, having spent 15 years in the Army and having used knives from time to time. I never cut anyone else with a knife but, like my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring), I have succeeded in cutting myself.

It is extraordinarily difficult to define the sort of knives that we are discussing. The hon. Member for Provan referred to the use of a machete in the recent ghastly attack at an infants' school as "like cutting corn". We must avoid becoming too simplistic, because that is exactly the problem. That is a bizarre case, in which one can envisage ploughshares and wheat scythes being turned into swords.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds said that he had two souvenirs from Oman. When I was a boy scout, I had a sheath knife, which I was told at the time would count as an offensive weapon as it was approximately 5 in long. I think that it is still in a cupboard somewhere. It was not an offensive weapon, but it could easily have become one.

I also have somewhere in a cupboard a Japanese sword that my father brought back from the war. It could certainly be used as an offensive weapon, but it was not designed to be so. The worst weapons, however, are probably the collection of kitchen knives that, my wife bought for our new house. I have some experience of military matters, as I said, and I fear that if people were looking for a sharp, unpleasant and easily concealed weapon, they would choose one of those knives.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): They do.

Mr. Robathan: Yes, because the knives are lethal and sharp. I raised that matter not to make a petty point but because the fundamental thing is to change our culture so that people will not go out with a kitchen knife, one of these absurd combat knives or whatever.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Provan again as, in the Bill, we are developing a common-sense test—that an SAS combat knife, a Terminator or whatever it may be called, cannot be used for ordinary, legitimate reasons and should therefore be banned. That is right and proper.

The culture extends to the police. The past 30-odd years have been significant. Once upon a time, the police had more respect from the general public. There are many reasons why they have lost that respect; sometimes it has been their own fault, I accept, but largely they were undermined by people who fought a civil liberties campaign saying that the police were generally ill disposed towards young people, young people in groups, ethnic minorities and so forth.

Mention was made of the sus laws—I remember the campaign against them getting on for 20 years ago, and I believe that the Vagrancy Acts and the other legislation were changed after a royal commission—and I was reminded of listening to the man from Liberty. It was said that the police were using the law to discriminate against ethnic minorities and bully young people. My impression

of the police is that, although some of them may be bullies, in general they are not ill disposed towards anyone. They are genuinely trying to protect society.

We are turning back the tide by going against the permissive and civil liberties culture that led us to say that the police should be given no powers because everyone is basically decent and honest and does not need to be stopped and searched. The stop-and-search power in the Bill is crucial. One cannot stop someone carrying a knife if they can conceal it. One has to be able to stop and search people, for example, at football grounds, outside schools or if some drunken gang is harassing people in the street at midnight. The police must be able to search such people.

The headlines in several newspapers today concern drugs again and two unfortunate teenagers, who I understand committed suicide. The police could also search for drugs. Surely the connection between drugs and violence, and alcohol and violence, I freely admit, is well established. We must understand that we have to give the police those powers.

I want the culture of permissiveness—perhaps that is not quite the right word and I should call it the culture of civil liberties—that was so anti-police to be turned back. We need to develop a culture that supports the police. The hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam), in a moving speech, mentioned one of his constituents who was murdered. We must have a culture in which, if we see a policeman in trouble, we do not turn our backs or cross to the other side of the street, but we help or ensure that the policeman gets help from other policemen if not from ourselves.

As Mrs. Lawrence said so sensibly, we also need to teach the difference between right and wrong in every school, rather than hoping that in some strange way children will absorb that message from watching far too much television.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman is making a good and thoughtful contribution to the debate. Does he acknowledge that the request by the police, and particularly the Police Superintendents Association of England and Wales, is to have powers that will enable them to intervene to protect the public as necessary, without excessively infringing civil liberties and undermining public confidence? Does he agree that that balance has to be achieved?

Mr. Robathan: I am delighted to agree, because we need a balance. Often, particularly in party politics, we go one way or the other too quickly. The hon. Gentleman may agree that, in the 1960s and early 1970s, the pendulum swung too far. Perhaps, if we had managed to contain the swinging, we would be in less trouble now.

In my time in the armed forces, I went to too many funerals. People were killed in Ireland and some were killed in accidents. About five and a half years ago, shortly before I was elected, I attended the funeral of a young man I knew well, who had been knifed in a park on Chadwell heath. Drugs were involved. No one knew exactly what had happened, but it was suggested that the young man who knifed him was carrying drugs and attacked because of some dispute. The young man who was killed was charming and the apple of his parents' eye—his father was a policeman, in fact. I am sure that we all have tales of similar tragedies, which show that we must change this culture.

I do not want to make a party political point on this. The hon. Member for Blaydon made a good and sensible speech. He talked about a civilised society. I hope that we can all agree that a civilised society is not one in which anyone would normally carry a knife unless for some sensible reason.

Let me return to my point about permissiveness. I recall the then Home Secretary in 1966 saying that the permissive society was a civilised society. No Liberal Democrat Members are here and that Home Secretary is now a noble Lord speaking for the Liberal Democrats in the other place. We must turn back that culture and get it right. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Provan has come forward with this Bill and that we can have a sense of balance, as the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth said.

11.17 am

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Every day we read in the newspapers about stabbings. This morning, I read about the stabbing of an elderly lady by someone who tricked his way into her home. Most of the cases never reach the national papers, but in our local papers in our constituencies, hardly a day goes by without an account of a stabbing. That demonstrates what my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) said about there being 1,000 such incidents every day.

We are in a serious situation, and it is a tragedy that knives are so commonplace. In one sense, of course, knives will always be commonplace: they are in everyone's kitchen. Those who use that fact to argue that there is little that we can do, because we cannot get rid of knives altogether and that we are therefore fighting a losing battle, are wrong. That is akin to the argument that there is no point in cleaning our homes, because there will always be dust and dirt: we clean today and the dirt is back tomorrow, so why bother?

We need knives, and I am not suggesting that we go back to rending things with our bare hands, but I think that there is a qualitative distinction that can be identified between knives of the kind referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Provan, which are the main problem, and knives in the kitchen. It is a matter not of the sharpness of the knives but of their purpose and marketing.

It is perfectly legitimate to have an extremely sharp vegetable knife in my kitchen, but if I were sitting here with it in my handbag or walking along the street with it, it would be open to people to say that there was something peculiar about that, unless I had just bought it and was carrying it home, in which case I could produce a receipt. It is perfectly sensible to say that kitchen knives do not present a major problem. Of course it is impossible to legislate against somebody in a fit of temper picking up a bread knife and stabbing somebody, but that should not stop us legislating where we can do so sensibly.

Marketing is the major factor. It can be said that there would be no supply if there were no demand, but I believe that the supply stimulates the demand and that people are incited to be interested in such weapons by advertisements such as those described today by hon. Members of all parties.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Does my hon. Friend agree that the knife culture in this country also emanates to a great extent from the violence in the Hollywood movies

[Mr. Don Dixon]

that are churned out? Many advertisements show film stars holding knives, and that incites youngsters to buy knives.

Mrs. Wise: I agree. It is often said that people are not influenced by films or by television; I do not believe that. A constant diet of violent images must have an impact. Those who advertise consumer goods believe that too, as otherwise they would keep their money in their businesses and not bother spending it on advertising. If television had no influence, why would they use it? Of course it has an influence.

To those who say that everything is justified in the name of art and constantly refer us to Shakespeare—usually "Hamlet"—I would say that children never subsisted on an unadulterated diet of "Hamlet"; besides which, it is a little presumptuous of film-makers to class themselves in Shakespeare's category.

There is a place for drama, even on unpleasant or violent themes, but it is not acceptable that it is beamed into our homes day after day and watched by children from their earliest years.

Mr. Robathan: I agree whole-heartedly with the hon. Lady. She specifically mentioned "Hamlet". When she was a child, did she come home from watching a play or a film and not then enact to a certain extent what she had seen? I remember a character called Hopalong Cassidy, whom I saw at a children's party; as soon as we had watched the film, we rushed out and played cowboys and Indians. Is not that what most children do?

Mrs. Wise: The hon. Gentleman is right. The problem is that what children may enact nowadays after seeing it on television is a lot more dangerous than Hopalong Cassidy.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael), I heard with dismay a person who markets knives saying that we are tinkering with the law, so he will tinker with his advertisements. That gentleman on the radio this morning showed that not only a knife culture but a business culture is at fault—a culture that says that anything that makes a profit is fine. I do not agree with that.

The appeal to greed, justifying anything in the name of money-making, is obnoxious. We are dealing with two equally obnoxious cultures: the knife culture among too many young people, and a creed of business greed among too many of those engaged in commerce. I deplore them both.

The gentleman on the radio said that he had an excellent relationship with the Advertising Standards Authority. I only hope that that was not accurate. If it was, the authority should tighten its attitude and its procedures. He boasted that he would be able to get round the legislation, and I hope that he will be proved wrong.

If marketing cannot be stopped, the knife culture cannot be arrested. If marketing, advertising and glamorising can be stopped, we can prevent knives from ever getting into many people's hands and we can remove the attraction.

My only worries about the Bill concern some of the defences. We—I include myself as a sponsor of the Bill—are allowing a defence that the knife is "an antique or curio". I hope that that defence is not pleaded too often, because it would be a poor defence if people started using such objects as street weapons.

A constituent rang me the other day to tell me about an advertisement that he had received in the post for a knife that was described as a decorative object but had exactly the sort of blade and other attributes that make a knife especially dangerous. Although the knife was £145 to buy, it could be obtained by sending a first payment of only £14.50.

Such an advertisement could get into the home of a law-abiding person and a youngster there could pick it up and obtain a very dangerous knife by sending £14.50, which is not a lot of money. I was worried by that, and my constituent was more than worried: he was livid. We must be careful that we do not allow too many loopholes and that they are not taken advantage of too much.

Mr. McWilliam: In 1988, I had the honour to be presented with a kukri by the Brigade of Gurkhas. I have a duty to maintain it, but I keep it safely locked away. I do not hang it on the wall, because it is an exceedingly dangerous knife.

Mrs. Wise: I appreciate my hon. Friend's intervention. I was worried about the knives that the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) described hanging on his wall, even though they were behind glass. I did not think that that was a secure way to keep such weapons. I only hope that he is not robbed.

The main purpose of the Bill is to tackle marketing. I do not regard it as a threat to civil liberties. I am not at all averse to a civil liberty culture, but I do not think that the Bill harms that. If the police were to use the Bill unreasonably and without discretion, I would worry. I back the Bill on the assumption that the police are as worried as I am about the carrying of knives, want the estates and streets of my constituency to be safe and will not exceed their proper duties as a result of the Bill. I deplore it being described as in any way rolling back civil liberties, which are very important. Everyone, or at least every Opposition Member, wants to defend them; but all liberty is circumscribed in some way. I therefore have no hesitation in wishing to circumscribe the liberty of those who carry knives or market them for profit. I do not want the Bill to be misrepresented.

The main victims, and the main proponents, of the knife culture, are males, especially young males. The person who marketed knives who spoke on the radio this morning said that we should legislate against selling knives to under-18s. I thought about that, but then I read the Bill again and thought, no, he is absolutely wrong; he is clutching at a straw to contradict our Bill. The implication is that it is all right for an 18-year-old to be sold Terminator, Exterminator or Rambo knives but not for a 17-year-old. I object to them being sold to an 18-year-old just as much as I object to them being sold to someone who is 17 years, 11 months. Young males of 18, 19, or 20 are as liable to fall for macho knife culture as those under 18. The suggestion was an invitation to neglect our duty to consider knives properly and fully. I would hate the House to give the impression that achieving adulthood should rightly be accompanied by the ability to carry combat knives. They should have no place in anyone's life, youngster or adult.

Although the main victims and perpetrators of knife culture are young males, I also worry about girls. I do not want girls to fall into the trap of seeking spurious equality by aping boys by carrying knives; nor I do want them to be terrorised by young males who carry knives. Knives not only stab, they slash. That is why, when I came fifth in the ballot in which my hon. Friend the Member for Provan was fortunate enough to come first, I immediately thought of a Bill against combat knives. I though of it partly from the perspective of a woman. When I mentioned that to someone, he said, "Oh, but that is a male thing." However, girls and women may not only become victims; they have brothers, sons and fathers who may become victims. Women are afraid of violence and resistant to the culture that glamorises knives, but we are carried along willy-nilly. We may suffer as much through the loss of a loved son as through harm to ourselves.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): My hon. Friend may not know that years ago in Glasgow, during the gangland wars, young women carried the gang leaders' weapons in their handbags because police would search their boy friends but not them. It was a real problem. There are examples of women being involved in the culture of violence.

Mrs. Wise: As I was saying, I am afraid that some girls may regard knives as a symbol of equality. If boys have them, they want them. I do not think that equality is properly expressed in that way, but people imitate those who are regarded as displaying strength. That worries me, because I do not want girls to fall into that trap. That is why I want fewer knives around. I do not want their boy friends to carry knives that they may use to threaten people, and I do not want girls to carry knives on behalf of their young men. That is why my first thought when I gained a place in the ballot was to introduce a Bill on knives.

Sir Raymond Powell (Ogmore): I know that my hon. Friend speaks for women, and especially for shopworkers, because she is the president of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, which has 400,000 members, some 85 to 90 per cent. of whom are women, mostly young women. She knows that staff have recently been assaulted and people in shops have had knives thrust at them. I am glad that she is a sponsor of the Bill and can bring to bear her knowledge and responsibility as president of a union that looks after shopworkers. I hope that she will mention her reputation in that field.

Mrs. Wise: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for suggesting that I mention that because it was very much in my mind. Nowadays, with shops open all hours and all days, staff are often spread thinly through the day and can be lonely and vulnerable. It also means that they leave shops at 10 or 11 pm. After the last customers have gone and they have cashed up and tidied, everything is quiet and they go to lonely car parks. There have been nasty incidents in which staff have been attacked or threatened with knives or in other ways. I would not presume to think that shopworkers are the only people in such danger, but violence at work and soon after people finish work is increasing. He is right to say that that worries us in USDAW.

I keep starting to say how I wanted a Bill on this matter to be introduced. When my hon. Friend the Member for hon. Friend the Member for Provan came first in the ballot, I was more than happy when he suggested that he would like to pick that Bill. I thought that coming first in the ballot made it a near certainty, and so it has proved, that the Bill would make good progress and reach the statute book. I am therefore more than happy to be a co-sponsor of it, and I commend it to the House.

I am pleased that the Bill has won all-party support. It looks as though we shall have a useful measure on the statute book. I hope that it will prove to be as effective as I anticipate, especially those parts relating to the marketing and glamorising of knives.

11.40 am

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): If the newspapers are to be believed, the drafting of the Bill was a rather tortuous process. Although I slightly regret the fact that it has been available for only a couple of days, if that is the price to be paid for achieving consensus on this important issue, it is a price worth paying. I want to be entirely positive about the Bill.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) on introducing the Bill so effectively. In general, it has been well drafted and if I make any criticisms they are intended to be positive and helpful. I do not wish to delay the Bill's progress.

The Bill is a response to widespread public concern and a genuine problem in society, which was most dramatically illustrated by the tragic murder of Philip Lawrence, to whom most hon. Members have already referred. The problem runs far deeper than that, however. A couple of days ago, just outside my constituency, there was a serious stabbing at a school. Such events are almost daily occurrences; it is that which makes the problem so severe. We all know about the horrendous machete attack for which Horrett Campbell was responsible. A couple of years ago there was the tragic murder of 12-year-old Nikki Conroy of Middlesbrough—a girl the same age as my daughter. Such incidents bring home the severity of the problem.

If more evidence is needed, it is available from cold statistics. Year after year, indicators suggest that about 35 per cent. of all homicides in England and Wales are caused by a sharp instrument of some form. In Scotland the figure is even higher, at more than 50 per cent. A sharp weapon is used in 23 per cent. of muggings. Those statistics that impel the House to take action and to continue to do so until the problem is properly controlled.

Three directions should be followed. First, efforts should be made to address the availability and marketing of knives—the Bill makes good progress in that direction. Secondly, steps should be taken on the carrying of knives—again, the Bill makes some progress in that direction, although I would like more to be taken. Thirdly, we must address the knife culture. I congratulate the hon. Member for Provan on the way in which the Bill starts to deal with the serious problem posed by the knife culture. Brian Mackenzie, leader of the Police Superintendents Association, has said that many youngsters carry knives almost as a fashion accessory. That culture must be destroyed, because it is based on violence, which is dangerous to society. There is always a temptation among young people to be attracted by such a sub-culture, so firm action needs to be taken against it.

I am, nevertheless, concerned about two dilemmas posed by the Bill. They are similar to those that emerged during our efforts to tackle the problem of firearms. I am

[Mr. Piers Merchant]

in no sense criticising the Bill, but it is important to illustrate some of the difficulties that will arise as we try to tackle the problems it identifies.

The first dilemma is that, unfortunately, the Bill will not succeed in stopping all acts of violence involving knives. I hope, however, that it will help to reduce them; but by controlling the supply, we will not end all such violent incidents. There are two simple reasons for that. First, people will still have access to illegally held weapons and knives. Secondly, people will always have access to perfectly legally held knives, and will no doubt use them. That latter factor is a particular problem, because knives are widely held and freely available. The injury inflicted by a combat knife can also be inflicted by a knife whose sole intentional use is either for gardening or in the kitchen. We will be left with that problem even after the passage of the Bill.

The second dilemma is that knives can be held and used for all sorts of perfectly legitimate purposes. We will not be able to stop that. When we legislated on guns, there was sufficiently strong feeling to restrict their availability even to people who had used them for legitimate purposes and were perfectly law-abiding members of the public. I happen to agree with that—in fact, I would have been prepared to go even further, although I know that many of my hon. Friends were not, and were vexed by the Government's action.

It was possible to impose such controls on guns because a minority fall into the category of those which are legitimately held guns. The problem with knives and other sharp instruments is that we are talking not about a minority of the public but of probably every household in the country, all of which have legitimate access to knives and sharp instruments. There is nothing we can do about that.

When I spoke on the Second Reading of the Offensive Weapons Bill last year, I referred to the inventory that I had carried out in my house the morning before. I did not realise that I had an armoury of some 30 weapons that could be classified as offensive weapons. They could all have been used for violent purposes, if someone was so minded. I have garden knives, kitchen knives, hobby knives, and chisels. All those instruments are legally held. People will continue to hold such instruments. I merely mention that to try to quell expectations about the Bill solving the problem of the violent use of knives in crime. That will not happen, because people will always have access to knives.

More needs to be done than just to control the supply of knives, and firmer action must be taken against the carrying of a potentially offensive weapon. As for their supply and availability, I thoroughly applaud the first seven clauses of the Bill, and I recognise that they represent a major stride towards dealing with the problem. There are difficulties concerning definition, but an ingenious way has been found to deal with most of them—it would be impossible to deal with all of them.

Last year, I was pleased to be a member of the Committee that considered the Offensive Weapons Bill, and I was pleased to see it through all its stages. I had an exchange with the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) about advertising, because, at that time, I felt that restricting advertising alone would not achieve the purpose. It struck me that the problem lay with the availability and supply of offensive weapons rather than with advertisements about them.

I recognise that some advertising has glamorised knives and extended the knife culture, and I strongly regret and condemn it. I felt, however, that tackling advertising alone was not sufficient to deal with the problem. This Bill overcomes that difficulty, which is why I am happy to support it. It extends the attack against advertising and a wide range of marketing activity, including sale. That is crucial, and it is a distinct improvement on the suggestions made last year. It is a welcome development, which I happily accept.

As I hope I have shown, I regard the carrying of knives as crucial. If the Bill did not contain clause 8 and provide the additional stop-and-search powers, I would think it inadequate. The hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) stressed the importance of controlling marketing, but did not seem to be keen on the stop-and-search provision. If anything, I take the opposite view. The stop-and-search powers are essential. Because they are included in the Bill, I am satisfied; if they were not, I would not be satisfied.

I have some reservations about whether the stop-and-search powers go far enough, but I understand the need to balance the fair application of those powers and the need to prevent their being used excessively and so becoming a civil liberties problem. I recognise that that could happen, although I believe that the problems with stop and search that have often been articulated are more to do with police discipline than with the nature of the law itself.

Mr. Wray: The Minister and I spent many hours consulting the Home Office and various other people on the stop-and-search powers. Originally, I did not intend—and the Government did not request—stop-and-search powers to be part of the long title. We needed to amend section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, but found that it would not have applied to Scotland. That is why I left the door open by putting stop-and-search powers in the long title. There was no intention to have a separate clause giving random stop-and-search powers. I merely wanted to amend section 60 of the 1994 Act to provide the necessary powers to deal with knives as, under the 1994 Act at present, the powers deal only with violence. Everybody was happy with that arrangement.

Mr. Merchant: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says. I congratulate him on being prepared to include in the Bill the necessary amendment to section 60 of the 1994 Act to extend the stop-and-search powers of the police under that Act to cover the carrying of knives. I welcome that. I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not feel that I am being critical; I am not. I happen to think that there is a case for extending the powers a little further, but that does not mean that I am against what he has put in his Bill. I would like there to be some widening of the powers, either through this Bill or at some future stage.

Labour Members may believe that my constituency is a leafy suburb, but there is a difficult area in Penge, where there is a high level of violence, especially at weekends. The majority of the area's population are very concerned

about that and want the police to take firm action to deal with any sign of violence.

Mr. Brian David Jenkins (South–East Staffordshire): I have sat through all this debate and listened to all the references to violence in cities and large towns. The knife culture has spread to rural areas, including those in my constituency. Only last week, when one of my constituents saw someone trying to pinch his car and went to remonstrate, he was stabbed. That happened beside fields; this is not just an urban and inner-city problem. The knife culture is endemic, and is found in rural areas.

Mr. Merchant: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is right; I was merely giving an example from my constituency—which, for the purposes of this argument, does not have a green field in it. I have therefore to refer to an inner-urban area.

In the area of Penge that I mentioned, there is an undercurrent of violence. It is not part of the culture of the majority of the population, who want it stamped out. It might, at some stage, become necessary for the police to invoke the powers in this Bill. If they judge it to be right to do so, I would support them, but I would like them to be able to invoke them, in the first instance, for longer than the 24 hours provided for in the Bill. I accept that the Bill provides for subsequent periods to be added to the original 24 hours, but I should like the original period to be 60 hours so that it covers a weekend. Often, those who threaten violence, knife carrying or gang activities meet over a weekend, not for only 24 hours.

I should also like to extend the reasons for stop and search beyond the supposition that someone is carrying a knife, to include drugs. We heard a moving speech from the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam), who graphically described how often violence is linked with drugs. That, too, is an aspect that should be examined.

Mr. Michael: It is important that we engage with the important issues that the hon. Gentleman is raising, but we must do so with care. The period of 48 hours, which would be allowed under the Bill through the exercise of the initial 24 hours plus an extension of 24 hours, would meet what the experience of the police has shown to be necessary. It is important that we achieve a balance between the police having the right powers to protect the public and there being protections against any excessive use of those powers. Indeed, the police are very sensitive to that matter. The hon. Gentleman should be careful not to try to go too far and so disturb the consensus on making progress on the Bill.

Mr. Merchant: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was here when I said that I accepted that this is an extremely sensitive area and that it is important to get the balance right. I am simply pointing out that I am pulled in the direction of a slightly wider power than the one in the Bill. However, I also said earlier that it was not my intention to oppose or delay the Bill. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Minister that the House will return to the subject of knives and knife crime.

I am sure that this Bill, which I hope has a successful passage, will be an important milestone in the battle against knife crime. I do not believe, however, that this will be the final battle. I suspect that, in future, at least some hon. Members will find themselves in the House again, examining further measures which may emerge as necessary for controlling the scourge of knife crime. If so, I shall certainly welcome such measures if it can be shown that they will reduce further crime associated with knives.

11.58 am

Sir Raymond Powell (Ogmore): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) not only on grasping the nettle by introducing his Bill and on his good fortune in being number one in the ballot for private Members' Bills, but on using that good fortune to promote a controversial but very important Bill. I am sure that, by now, he has persuaded not only most of his colleagues on the Opposition Benches of his case, but, in all probability, many Conservative Members. The Bill is important, and it must be enacted very quickly. My hon. Friend has had the support of my right hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) throughout his campaign. No doubt with him on his side, his Bill is as good as passed.

Today is Friday the 13th, and people who are superstitious might say that that is unlucky. Today could indeed be very unlucky for some of those who trade or use knives, but lucky for those who have been the victims of people who use such weapons. This morning, when I arrived at 9.30 am, I had to look again at the Bill's title because, after seeing the hon. Members who were in the Chamber, I thought that we were engaged either in a sitting of the Scottish Grand Committee or in a Scottish debate. I thought that perhaps another Bill had been pushed in front of the one proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Provan. Only when I saw my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) did I realise that we must be debating this Bill. All my doubts were definitely dispelled when I saw my right hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow in the Chamber.

I pledge my support for the Bill and for its provisions to ban the sale and advertising of combat knives. I recall the shadow Home Secretary producing—I would not be able to get away with it—a large paper that showed, not only to the Home Secretary and a crowded House but to the television cameras and the public, the size of a combat knife. That proved conclusively to everyone who is involved or interested in this debate why it is necessary to ban such weapons and for the Bill to be passed. The Bill will stop the marketing of such lethal weapons and allow the police to stop and search gangs of youths who roam the streets tooled up for violence.

Today, my hon. Friend the Member for Provan has eloquently and clearly explained the Bill's provisions. He deserves the Government's congratulations, and their full support in enacting it as expeditiously as possible. I wonder whether the Minister has any objections to the Bill or whether, in his reply to this debate, he will promise us that it will have the Government's full support, and that it will be dealt with expeditiously in Committee and be on the statute book within weeks, in 1997.

Mr. Maclean: I had not intended to reply to this debate, but I can give the hon. Gentleman those assurances. There are a few small matters to be clarified—which will be technical, drafting amendments. I should like to discuss the stop-and-search powers, and the rank of an authorising officer, but those are matters for the Committee. I have no other objections to the Bill. Other hon. Members have not expressed to me other objections

[Mr. Maclean]

to it, or told me that they wish to stop it. I know of no reason why one Committee sitting should not be sufficient to deal with the small matters that I should like to discuss, or why the Bill cannot be on the statute book immediately after the other place has dealt with it.

Sir Raymond Powell: I am very grateful, as I am sure are the House and the nation, for those words of encouragement and support.

Hon. Members receive mail from across the country, from our constituents, and from others. Some letters worry us. In the past few months, hon. Members have received letters about guns and dogs, but especially about knives. All the letters reveal different attitudes. I received one this week from D. R. Stow of West Down, north Devon, who also enclosed a short poem entitled "Remember justice". It is relevant to our debate and I shall read it out so that hon. Members might understand what other people think.

"There was a time in days gone by
When justice for all was the common cry
When men of Honour could stand tall
And the law of the land was "Justice for All".
Then came a time when crime was rife
And politicians cried ban the gun, the dog, the knife!
I was guilty of no crime
But the politicians said the fault was mine.
My dog, a kindly old soul
Was no longer allowed his daily stroll
The pistol I shot in my leisure time
Through no fault of mine became a crime
The penknife I used in my daily work
In the eyes of the press became a deadly Dirk.
As I sit and wonder with a shrug
At what time did I become a thug
All I ask in this simple plea
Is for God's sake punish the criminal . . . not me!"

I do not agree with everything in the poem, but I do not think that the person who wrote it was directing his attention to our discussions. All of us are worried about guns; I am a dog lover and I am worried about restrictions on dogs; today we are worried about knives. It is essential that the Bill is given adequate consideration before it is put on the statute book to ensure that it does not restrict people unnecessarily.

In October this year, Frances Lawrence, the widow of the murdered head teacher Philip Lawrence, wrote in her manifesto for the nation:

"Is it not shocking to discover how easy it is to acquire battlefield blades which can have no function other than to be flourished by the inadequate and cowardly?"

That message explains the necessity for the Bill.

I have listened to most speeches in the debate this morning, and every hon. Member has made telling points. I especially congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) on the message in her speech. I wonder where she gets her energy, as she is standing for re-election as president of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers and, according to a report in *The Guardian* on Monday, is currently suffering interference by Tesco in USDAW's internal elections. That is something which unions have not known before, especially not the union by which I am sponsored and of which my hon. Friend is president.

I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Preston contributed to the debate and is a sponsor of the Bill. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Provan will appreciate her help. He will especially appreciate the help of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth, who has given so much time, effort and energy to the Bill. I hope that the Government will back it and that, once it is in Committee, the House will not delay it, but ensure that it becomes law.

12.8 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): This has been a good debate, as the hon. Member for Ogmore (Sir R. Powell) said. Friday debates bring out the real personalities of hon. Members, and can produce extraordinary consensus or disagreement across the House.

I cannot think of a previous occasion in nearly 10 years in the House on which I have agreed with nearly everything that the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) has said. I served on a council with her daughter for six years before coming here, and I cannot recall agreeing with anything that she said, either. However, I agree with what the hon. Lady said today. The hon. Member for Ogmore was right to pay tribute to her thoughtful treatment of the subject.

The debate has not been party political—or at least, not until the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) spoke. We all understand that that is how he speaks, and we indulge it. There is no issue on which he cannot act like a pit bull terrier, with blatant disregard for the facts. That is understandable. The House absorbed his contribution, and returned to a non-party political debate on this serious issue.

The Bill has several worthwhile elements. We have to accept—this is not a party political point—that it is based on proposals set out by the Government in November to tighten the rules on the marketing for knives and to strengthen police stop and search powers. Much mention has been made already of the obnoxious gentleman on Radio 4 this morning, who seemed to treat the issue as a game that did not matter. He believes—when pressed even gently, he could not prove this—that all the knives he sells are put in glass cases. There is very little chance of that being correct. An examination of his company by the constabulary would be welcome.

The issue is not a game. As Mrs. Lawrence has shown the nation, it is a serious business. The starting point has to be advertising. It is important to get rid of the style of marketing of knives that suggests an aggressive use for them. If we allow such marketing to continue, not just combat knives but others that resemble them will be carried.

The offence should apply to the name of the knife and to any associated marketing literature. Clauses 1 and 2 make aggressive marketing of knives illegal.

At the start of my speech, I was carried away with my comments about the hon. Member for Preston, and neglected to pay an enormous tribute to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray). His decision to introduce the Bill is commendable. I hope that hon.

Members on both sides and people outside will recognise what he has done. He has also proved himself an able parliamentarian.

This is a short Session. A private Member's Bill is a delicate flower in any Session, and can be struck down by any group that opposes it. The hon. Gentleman has taken a small bite of the issue and brought forward a narrow Bill that does not go beyond what we can prove or what we believe we can do. It is clear that hon. Members on both sides support the Bill. I pay tribute to his wisdom in that. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) is right to say that we shall have to return to the issue because the Bill is narrow, but that is a tribute to the skill of the hon. Member for Provan, not a criticism.

The stronger stop-and-search powers for the police are right. Any attempt to ban the sale of certain types of knife or to restrict the marketing of knives will have only a limited impact on knife-related crime. Criminals can and do use many other objects to commit crime, including a variety of kitchen knives, screwdrivers or the murderous Stanley knives that many of us have at home.

The Government believe—and the Opposition now believe—that the most effective way in which to make our streets safer from knives and offensive weapons is to strengthen the powers of the police to stop and search people. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) mentioned people who were against the Bill. The more he lists those who are against the Bill, the more everyone else in the country will be in favour of it. He did the House a good service in listing those people.

The Bill would amend the code of practice of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 so that the police can stop and search anyone who is thought to be part of a gang. The tragic death of Philip Lawrence brought home to us that important point.

By chance, I drove past the Lawrences' home in Ealing, which is not far from where I live, last Friday. Until then, I had not known where they lived, except that it was in Ealing. The reason I found out where they lived was that there were police and a gaggle of camera crews outside.

I am sure we all abhor the problems that the Lawrence family are having with malicious and sick-minded people. However, the tranquillity and peace of the Lawrence family is not helped by the huge media attention, with camera crews, a links vehicle with its enormously high aerial, and reporters gathered outside their house, over-reporting an incident that was personal to the family. The press should show a little more self-control when they report such matters.

My next remarks may seem to be criticisms of the Bill, although I hope that the hon. Member for Provan will accept that they are not. They are simply observations about the difficulty of this whole area of law. The shadow Home Secretary, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)—this is not a criticism of him—said that he would soon come up with a definition of a knife that should not be carried. He has not done so—which is not surprising, as it is almost certainly impossible. A number of incidents have led me to believe that.

I discussed the matter with staff of the Crown Prosecution Service in Harrow and with some of the national people. My fear is that, if we get rid of combat knives, we are left with the kitchen knives that hon. Members have talked about, the fish-scaling knives that anglers use, and all sorts of other knives that are murderous. Every time that someone is stopped with one of those knives, he will either be a fisherman on the way to buy a fishing rod or a trainee chef on the way to find a job. The defence mounted will be so convincing that a number of people will get away with it, and the law will be brought into disrepute.

My point is not a criticism of the Bill; Parliament has to attempt to legislate on knives, and we are right to do so today. Nevertheless, my right hon. Friend the Minister and the police must keep a watching brief on precisely what is happening in the courts. They must consider whether we need to modify the law as we go along to catch the criminals.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman is making a serious point. He is right to say that we need to keep an eye on the way in which the law is implemented.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Bill contains elements that deal separately with the definition of what can and cannot be sold? Does he also agree that the Bill allows the courts to make a common-sense judgment, as they do when dealing with the carrying of an offensive weapon? The Bill allows, as it were, the elephant to be recognised even when it cannot be defined. It allows the courts to exercise common sense as Parliament and the public wish them to do.

Mr. Hughes: Absolutely. The Bill covers that issue as well as it can. However, I have a deep suspicion that it will be monkeyed about with by clever lawyers, who will attempt to move the definition and prove that someone has the right to carry a knife.

I understand that certain Rastafarian youths in south London carry a knife with a short blade and a sharp serrated edge. When they are stopped, they tell the police that they are vegetarian and are carrying a fruit peeling knife. Although I am also a vegetarian, I do not possess a fruit peeling knife, and if I did, I certainly would not be carrying it now. That illustrates the problem of people carrying knives, apparently for legitimate use.

In a recent incident—which I shall not explain in detail, as it has yet to come before the courts—a man carrying a meat cleaver was stopped near a school. It is a particularly sensitive issue because of the terrifying incident that came to court so recently. The man's initial defence—that no doubt will be pursued—was that it was a tool of his trade. A number of people will use that defence.

I welcome the Bill. It is important that we do as much as we can to prevent the trade in murderous knives, so that young people who may consider them fashionable know that Parliament will bear down on the problem now and in future. We have to keep an open mind as to further changes in the law. It gives me great pleasure to support the hon. Member for Provan today.

12.21 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I am absolutely delighted to speak in today's debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) is an incredible character. In many ways, he is one of the largest figures in the House, and he is one of my closest friends.

[Mr. Thomas Graham]

Let me give some of the background to my support of the Bill. My hon. Friend and I both come from Glasgow. My hon. Friend comes from the Gorbals, and I come from the neighbouring area of Govan. I remember the anger and frustration of my parents and many others in Glasgow when the book called "No Mean City" was written. It gave the impression that there was gang warfare in every street, village and hamlet. That is completely untrue. It portrayed Glasgow in a terribly bad light throughout the world. It was a best seller for the wrong reasons. My hon. Friend will agree that it did not describe Glasgow as it really was.

Glasgow is one of the finest cities in the world. It has some of the warmest, most lovable people. Anyone and everyone should come and visit Glasgow. It is a city of culture—a wonderful place with marvellous people, and we have a marvellous time there. People do not walk about with knives, razors and tackety-boots to kick the hell out of folk. That is not our city. However, in common with other cities, Glasgow has its yobbo culture and suffers the same problems. The House is designed to introduce legislation to limit the damage that can be done to our good folk who want to live in peace and harmony and enjoy the full fruits of life.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend has introduced the Bill. There is a obviously a tremendous need for it, as the crime statistics show. I shall not go on about the crime statistics, but I should like to raise a number of issues.

In my constituency, a couple of young policemen have been stabbed and seriously injured. I know many young people who have been stabbed and had to go to hospital, and have been maimed for life. I know people who have been killed with knives.

I heard the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) speak about his youth, and about being in the Army for 15 years. I do not want to imply any criticism, but I presume that he was an officer, given that he is a Tory. I presume that he went into the Army for 15 years because he could not get a job because his dad's business was not big enough. The young folk I knew had to go into the Army because they could not get a job, but while they were serving, they were sheltered from some of the things that happened to civilians in the cities; they missed what we call the culture of violence.

I remember my days in Glasgow when I was young. I lived on the streets of Glasgow, in the sense that I went to the dances and the parks. I watched the clowns—I called them clowns—who were the nonentities in a gang or a group of young men. They were probably not the strongest physically, and they were certainly not the cleverest in the group. As I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Provan would agree, some of them would come up and flash their knife or dagger—the Nazi daggers that were floating around Glasgow at the time—and think that they were tough, hard men. A guy became a hard man because, in Glasgow slang, he was carrying a chiv—a weapon, a blade. People would talk about these guys, and they became a big man, a hard man. People would say, "Willie's carrying a chiv," and Willie's reputation grew as a result.

I watch movies; I am a movie buff, I buy videos until they come out of my ears, and enjoy watching them for relaxation. Members of Parliament cannot always watch television programmes at the right time, so there is nothing finer—perhaps folk will find this strange—than watching a video at 2 o'clock in the morning, which I do to wind down.

I like a lot of foreign film stars, but when I watch Rambo shooting 200 or 300 people, I wonder how there was ever a war. If they had brought him in, the rest of them in the war would have been down the road in five minutes. I have seen "Die Hard", "Die Harder" and "Die Hard with a Vengeance", with guys crawling about buildings, lobbing this and that, and blowing everything to smithereens.

I remember the Kung Fu pictures, when they kicked their feet up and there was a wee blade in the shape of a star, which would be thrown all of a sudden, slice someone's head—and they were dead. I even remember Odd Job in the James Bond films. He looked a bit like me in those days, except he had a hat that he threw at someone's head—and they were dead.

We should think about the fact that all that violence was designed to kill, maim and look great. Everyone used to say, "Oh, what a movie. That was great killing." I remember going to the matinees when I was a young kid and seeing Tom Mix, shooting and blowing people away with his gun. It was great. I remember Robin Hood with his bow and arrow and William Tell's great victory. All the kids came out of the pictures and ran along the road pretending to be Tom Mix, William Tell and Superman.

We are conditioning our kids to accept violence. We are bringing them up right in the middle of that violent core. We have created a culture of violence through propaganda and by allowing television, radio and video to become rampant. I am not calling for censorship or for a restriction of civil liberties: I am asking for common sense.

Not long ago, in preparation for the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Provan, I visited a knife shop. I could not believe the display of horrific knives. There was a knife like a sword: if it were put into somebody and pulled out, all their guts would spill all over the table. That is different from a kitchen knife. I am not saying that kitchen knives do not kill, because they do. Put them in and pull them out and there is blood. However, when Rambo knives are put in, they rip out and cause mind-boggling damage.

Many young folk think it glamorous to carry a knife and to act the tough nut on the hard man scene. Their pals think, "Wait a minute, look at wee Willie. He is a tough, hard man, and I would like to be tough." Everybody would like to be able to hold their own, but that does not happen in life. I know people who have been stabbed to death or maimed for life because of the culture of knives. Young people can be conned by all the glamour, and we must start doing something to stop that.

I fully and vigorously support my hon. Friend's Bill. It is a small step, but a major step in the right direction. It will send signals to the advertisers and the manufacturers who make money from those horrible weapons. It will send a signal to the young folk that those knives are not glamorous. We want to see the glamour of young men and women competing in sport and aspiring to make Britain great again. We want to see competition in the job market. The Government should listen to my plea, because education is a vital way out. Give education to

our young folk, give them hope for a job, and they will not want the glamour of Rambo knives and the Rambo culture.

I am delighted to support my hon. Friend the Member for Provan. His initiative will go some way to bringing back sanity and sense to Britain in a way that has not been successful before.

12.31 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) on bringing forward his important Bill. He made only one mistake: he should have asked me to become one of his sponsors, because I would have done so with the greatest of pleasure, especially as his Bill follows neatly on the Offensive Weapon Act 1996, which I introduced to the House this year. His Bill will be a further step towards breaking the knife culture. That is an issue that I have been following since 1987, when I came across the Dennison family from Bethnal Green and Stepney, whose 17-year-old son had been tragically stabbed to death.

The number of knife-related incidents in this country is disturbingly high. Despite the Dunblane tragedy, more people are killed by the knife than by the gun. There are reports all over the newspapers today about the widow, Alice Rye, who opened her door to a killer who sexually assaulted her and then stabbed her to death—one more tragic case in a long catalogue. In the past week alone, stories of two knife incidents have appeared in the national press. We read of the 15-year-old schoolboy who was slashed with a knife during a history lesson at a Dulwich school. We heard of the trial of the 15-year-old boy who plunged a 4 in knife into the chest of his best friend and killed him. We do not even hear about the rest of the incidents.

The tender years of those assailants is not unusual. The problem is most acute among males in their mid-teens, beginning as young as 13 and through to the early 20s. It has been pointed out to me by the police that the vast majority of those teenagers come from chaotic family backgrounds, largely—I regret to say—single-parent ones.

In the year to April 1995, 2,550 offences of violence against the person in the Metropolitan police area involved knives or other sharp instruments and each year the figure increases. Sutton, a seemingly peaceful, green and leafy suburb, has had its share of tragedies. Earlier this year, my research assistant was the victim of an attempted knife-point robbery.

Above all, we must pay tribute to the police, the men and women who pay such a high price while trying to protect us as we go about our business. I am sorry to sound in a discordant note, but I am disappointed that Labour Members somehow forgot to mention the police, which I am sure they would have done had they reflected.

Mr. Michael: In my speech, I referred to the great co-operation that we have had from the police and from the difference associations, particularly the superintendents. We have had extended discussions in trying to help my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) in designing his Bill. The hon. Lady is wrong to make that comment, which is not only discordant, but inaccurate.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. I concede that he had discussions with the police, but I was seeking a tribute to the sacrifice that they have made, which goes one stage further.

In 1994 alone, more than 1,000 police officers in England and Wales were seriously assaulted and injured. In the past 10 years, eight officers have died directly as a result of stabbing. Two years ago, Sergeant Derek Robertson, the father of two children, was stabbed to death when he was called to the scene of robbery at a sub-post office in Croydon.

I have met some brave officers who have been stabbed. Their experiences are humbling and we do not appreciate how much they have gone through. Interestingly, they tell me that, unlike the fights depicted on television, a knife fight is usually over almost as soon as it has begun. For example, in an incident in north London, an attacker was able to stab three officers—one a woman, Helen Barnett—11 times in the time it took a fourth officer to cross one lane of stationary traffic. The attack that led to the tragic death of Philip Lawrence was over in a matter of seconds. How right Frances Lawrence was when she said:

"A knife is an inanimate object and it needs a human being to invest it with murderous properties."

I have already referred briefly to my private Member's Bill, now the Offensive Weapons Act 1996, which I took through the House. To tackle the overwhelming culture of knives takes a united will by all of us, which is why we are here and so supportive of the hon. Member for Provan. I rushed my contribution forward and pressed the Home Office to allow me to introduce the Bill the very weekend that Philip Lawrence died. I knew that we would have public support for firm and direct action.

My Act, which was spelt out in detail by my right hon. Friend the Minister, made significant steps along the way. It gave the police powers of arrest when they have found someone carrying a knife without a good reason. That was an important measure because, until then, the police could issue that person only with a summons.

The Act also brought in stiffer penalties for possessing knives and a ban on the sale of knives to children aged 16 and under. I hope that we shall keep that age under review and that we might reflect that it would be more effective and more powerful if we raised it to 18. Above all, the Act introduced the important measure of giving police powers to go into schools to make searches and, if necessary, arrests. That measure was warmly received by teachers. My Act, therefore, paved the way for this one.

Some of the provisions in this Bill were discussed during the passage of my Act. I too have been concerned about the way in which knives are advertised in magazines. Some advertisements are disturbingly written. It is done in such a way as to incite the purchaser not only to buy the knife, but to commit a brutal and appalling offence. The language includes such phrases as "razor sharp stainless steel",

"nearly half a foot long when opened",

and

"belt sheaf knife—ready for action".

[Lady Olga Maitland]

I discussed the problem at length with Home Office officials and with the Advertising Standards Authority, but the answers were not satisfactory. I was told that as the ASA had received very few complaints—barely a dozen in recent years—it felt that there was no cause for action. That may be so, but it does not reflect the concerns of a large number of people. In any case, the ASA has few powers of sanction at the best of times. However, I concede that it did undertake a review, and it was important to see the outcome; even if—as the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) would agree—it was not very helpful. We had to give the ASA a chance.

What worries me is how easy it is to buy hideous and brutal knives anonymously through the post with no questions asked. *Police* magazine put a Sussex firm to the test by using a credit card to send off for a 7 in stainless steel jungle Yatagan Bowie, priced £27.50. It came back by return of post. The Bowie knife was known to the police because, a few days earlier, a man had killed his employer using such a knife, which not only severed the victim's ribs but brought his lungs out on the serrated edge. West Midlands police drew attention to the great dangers of this type of weapon being advertised. In the sales literature, the makers shamelessly describe the knife as

"designed to go with the arm to maximise the cutting edge."

That knife is still available today.

I share the reservations of the Police Federation, which feels that, although we are trying hard to remove inciting advertising slogans, there is a danger that the retailers will simply describe the knives as hunting or sporting knifes. Therefore, we must keep a careful watch on how effective the measure will be. As in all things, we can come back to the measure to see how we can improve it. I very much hope that, ultimately, we will devise a method of defining such knives so that they too can be banned. I realise that that is difficult. It is a challenge, but I do not believe that it is beyond us.

At present, we must content ourselves with curbing the marketing of such knives, and I welcome the provisions in the Bill to make it a criminal offence to market them and to give the police powers to seize both the publications and the knives themselves. I welcome the fact that the penalty could be a maximum of six months in gaol and a heavy fine. I also welcome the fact that the police will be able to search not only a person, but any premises—be it a home, a shop, an office, a factory or even a tent. The police will be able also thoroughly to search cars, ships and aircraft to tackle smuggling. Most knives are bought over the counter, but such is the pernicious nature of the advertisements that to curb them and the appetites for such knives and weapons must be worth while—after all, one fewer knife sold is certainly likely to be another life saved.

The most significant part of the Bill gives the police powers to stop and search where they fear a serious risk of violence over a period of 24 hours. This is where I see the greatest progress being made in tackling knife crime. The police have been frustrated for a long time about their search and arrest powers, and that was another issue that I looked at carefully in drafting the Offensive Weapons Bill. I, at least, was able to give the police greater powers of arrest when finding someone carrying a knife without good reason, but until my Bill came along, the best the police could do was to send a summons through the post. I felt that more needed to be done.

The law has been too restrictive. For example, if a police officer on patrol comes across a group of youths outside a disco and suspects that there could be trouble, under the rules of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, unless he has reason to believe that a knife is being held—not just a hunch, but because he has been told that it is or has seen a knife—he cannot instigate a search. A police officer cannot stop and search someone on account of the colour of their skin, the shape of the eyes, the haircut, the style of clothing, or even the knowledge that the person has previous convictions for carrying knives. Often, knives come to light too late, when the damage has been done or when the carrier is being searched in connection with another offence.

The laws have also been too restrictive for effective policing, especially if violence is brewing or we know that it is likely to happen. While I agree about the need to protect citizens from unreasonable demands for searches, the balance must also be struck for the right of the public to go about their business safely and with a calm mind. There is no question of returning to the much-hated sus laws. I did not hear the remarks made by the spokesman from Liberty on the radio this morning, but if I had, I would have choked over my coffee. I would have taken grave exception to them, given the way in which Liberty has been portrayed in the House today. Clearly, the civil liberties lobby was getting its sense of proportion wrong. We ought to be protecting the public first.

With that in mind, I entirely support the move to give the police the right to stop and search if they fear that violence may break out in a locality and that offensive weapons, such as knives, might be used. The Bill stipulates only that a superintendent should have the power to authorise searches. I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Minister that that could be a cumbersome process. The police officer at the scene would have to refer back to his superintendent. It would make more sense to give that authority to the station inspector, who could be required to report regularly to his superintendent on his radio telephone.

I also question whether 24 hours is sufficient. I suggest that 48 hours would be a more realistic and flexible time frame, although I accept that the 24-hour period is renewable. It will be wise for the House to consider carefully how that clause works in practice.

We ought to learn from the experiences and successes of Operation Blade, which was set up by Strathclyde police, who already have much those wider powers. They had to take action to counter the unacceptably high level of violent crime. Random searches were first carried out over a period of three months in 1993. Nearly 30,000 people were stopped and searched, and 548 offensive weapons were seized. Such was the professional manner in which the operation was carried out that only four people complained, each of whom was subsequently found with a knife.

Clearly, there are lessons to be learned. Strathclyde police began with a massive public education programme in the media. They put out a poster, which went everywhere, with a telling photograph of a young man

with a knife in his belt being arrested and the headline, "Who's not partying tonight?" Significantly, the other side of the poster carries various newspaper headlines, such as, "Knife thug is jailed" and "Vicious Ned gets 15 years". Those are clear warnings that such behaviour cannot be tolerated.

The Strathclyde police also had a plan for people to surrender their knives—not an amnesty, because that almost sounds like forgiveness—into knife bins placed in strategic places, such as pubs, clubs and fast food restaurants, but not police stations, where people with a guilty conscience who are fearful of being identified would not bin their knives. It was effective, and many thousands of weapons were handed in as a result. The retailers played their part, and 87 of them withdrew knives from display because they could have been deemed to inciting bad behaviour.

The programme also included schools. It was interesting in human terms that there was a reduction in the number of people admitted to casualty departments in local hospitals. The Glasgow Royal infirmary reported a 50 per cent. drop in serious stab wounds.

The experiment in Scotland has been extremely successful. The random stops and searches continue over limited periods, so that people know when they are happening, and they are now accepted as a matter of course. Public support is essential for such measures; that has been achieved in Scotland, and knife crime is beginning to decrease.

Every person who carries a knife is saying that he is prepared to use it. The weapons that we are talking about have the potential to inflict serious injury or death, so it is incumbent on us all to support tough action to curb gratuitous violence. In the end, thuggery must be met firmly and properly. My advice to those young thugs as they go out tonight—Friday night—is to leave their knives at home; they should put into their pocket only their cash and their keys, and save another life.

I wish the hon. Member for Provan godspeed with this important Bill, which is a successor to my Offensive Weapons Bill and to a considerable track record of effective Conservative legislation to tackle crime.

12.51 pm

Mr. Wray: I am delighted with the tremendous contributions made by many hon. Members. Everyone who lives in a deprived area will know about the violence that goes on there. Sometimes it saddens my heart when I walk through the city centre to a place called Paddy's market, which is like a social service in Glasgow, and see many men and women with scars on their faces. It makes me wonder what kind of society we are living in. I hope that the Bill can play its part in stamping out the minority of thugs who run around terrorising old women and slashing unarmed men and women in all parts of every city in Britain. That is one of the reasons why I introduced the Bill.

I was very sad when I heard about the death of Mr. Lawrence. He was a compassionate family man, doing a grand job, and a thug with a knife took his life away for no earthly reason and left fragmentation, misery and sorrow for the wife and family. That is the kind of thing that every hon. Member has spoken about today.

We must be extremely careful about civil liberties—we have had discussions with many organisations—but I often wonder about the civil liberties of the 136 people in Scotland who lost their lives last year. I like to be extremely tough but extremely compassionate, and I do not think that the civil liberties lobby can complain about anything in the Bill.

We did not want any special clauses allowing anyone who was black, wearing bovver boots or driving a downtown car from a downtown area to an up-market area to be arrested by the police. I discussed that extremely carefully with the Minister, and that is why we decided to amend section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. The police already have powers to stop and search in anticipation of violence; the Bill merely gives them extra powers in respect of knives.

Hon. Members have been concerned about what has happened in their areas over the past two or three years. I do not like to take all the credit for this Bill, because many hon. Members, both men and women, have sown its seeds with other legislation over the past 10 years. I feel like the ploughman throwing the fertiliser to keep the cause growing, so that our streets can be clean of the knives and thugs that annoy the public. Only a tiny minority is involved. I will do anything I can as a Member of Parliament to make life safer.

I thank the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland). She can rest assured that it would have been a great honour if she had been a sponsor of my Bill. I offer her membership of the Committee, if she wants it. I hope that it does not last too long and that she will not table many amendments, certainly not wrecking amendments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hesitate to interrupt, but all Members are hon. Members, not ladies or gentlemen.

Mr. Wray: Thank you for that correction, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I would be delighted if the hon. Lady served on the Committee. We need another eight members, so any hon. Member with a real interest is welcome. I hope that no one will try to wreck this important Bill. I want it to go on the statute book. That is why we spent so many hours working together on it.

I thank my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington). I know that he is not well, but he took the trouble to come today because he thought that there would be a vote. I am glad that he felt that the Bill was so important. I hope that other Opposition Members who would like serve on the Standing Committee will give their names to my right hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon). I thank hon. Members for coming along.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Prisons (Alcohol Testing) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

12.57 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is a pleasure—and something of an irony—to have the privilege of moving the Second Reading of this Bill after the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) so deftly took his Bill through its Second Reading. It is ironic, because my wife opposed him when he was first elected for Provan in 1987.

It is nice that we are now working on the same side on law and order, because the House used to give a false impression of what law and order was about. It used to give the impression that the only people who were concerned about it were a small coterie of Conservative Back Benchers who caused grief for Ministers but reflected a wide band of public opinion that was deeply concerned about the matter.

This debate, and the Bill of the hon. Member for Provan, show that concern for law and order exists across the House. It is a great concern of the British people and all politicians in the House are anxious, in our own ways, to bring more peace and tranquillity to our streets, cities and rural areas. The Bill, which I have great pleasure to introduce on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Ward), who unfortunately cannot be here due to other duties to which he is attending, is presented in the same spirit.

The Prison Service is an integral part of the law and order system. I wholeheartedly agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary that our prisons should be decent but austere. I am reminded of an occasion that must be familiar to many right hon. and hon. Members as they ferry their families backwards and forwards from their constituencies to Westminster. My two boys were misbehaving in the back of the car and one of them had failed to put his seat belt on. My good lady wife turned round to him and said, "If you don't put your seat belt on, a policeman will see you and you will go to prison and get nothing but bread and water."

It occurred to us then that prison might offer rather an adventure to an energetic seven-year-old, not only because of the decent conditions, but because of the table tennis, the videos, the workshops and the extra-mural activities, not to mention the rather freer environment in some of our prisons than we would expect. We need look no further than some recent incidents, which have finished up being the subject of controversial debates on the Floor of the House about the nature of prisons and the lack of control in them, to understand how important it is that we maintain the objective of a decent but austere prison service. If I said to my seven-year-old son that he would have to suffer decent but austere conditions, I hope that he might, in future, understand that that means a punishment.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to introduce the Bill, which would give the Prison Service the power to test prisoners for alcohol. I may have to seek the forgiveness of the House when I admit that I was somewhat surprised to discover that prison officers did not already have that power. Even though we had previously introduced legislation to introduce mandatory drug testing in prisons, this lack of power represents a gap in the legislation governing England and Wales.

The Bill would enable a prison officer to take a sample of breath, urine, or any non-intimate sample, from a prisoner in any type of prison establishment for the purposes of ascertaining whether there is any alcohol in that prisoner's body. It is a logical extension of the powers already in force for mandatory drug testing, enacted by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

The introduction of alcohol testing would support amendments to the prison rules made in September 1996 to include disciplinary offences relating to the consumption of alcohol. Previously, prisoners could be punished only if they were found in possession of alcohol, or offended against good order and discipline after drinking it. Without more objective means of analysis, which would be provided by formal testing, the available evidence would often be insufficient to take disciplinary action. The new power would also enable checks to be made on whether a prisoner was complying with the condition that prohibits the consumption of alcohol in a temporary release licence given to him.

The need for that new power has been identified by Prison Service staff and boards of visitors. Alcohol consumption in custody appears to be a more serious problem in open prisons, where the low level of security and use of temporary release licences facilitate the smuggling of alcohol. In more secure prisons, such smuggling is more difficult because of the physical barriers and the searching of prisoners and visitors. The consumption of alcohol by prisoners released on temporary licence is also a serious cause of concern to communities close to prisons. The powers in the Bill would make a major contribution to tackling those problems.

Clause 1 amends the Prison Act 1952 by inserting a new section 16B. That section gives a prison officer the power, subject to an authorisation from the governor, and subject to the prison rules, to require any prisoner to provide a sample of breath for the purpose of ascertaining whether he or she has alcohol in their body.

The authorisation may

"require a prisoner to provide a sample of urine, whether instead of or in addition to a sample of breath"

and a non-intimate sample of any other description, not being a sample of breath or urine. The Bill contains that flexibility so that whatever is the most appropriate technology for the time being, for the prisoner or for the prison, it may be used. The power extends to young offender institutions, remand centres and secure training centres. The circumstances in which the power may be exercised, and ancillary matters, will be set out in the rules.

Clause 2 makes it clear that, in the case of a contracted-out prison, the requisite authorisation is to be given by the director. Clause 3 provides for the short title, commencement and extent of the Bill. The Bill extends only to England and Wales. However, the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, currently before the House, makes similar provision for Scotland.

I hope that I have given the House a fair and accurate description of the aims, principles and content of the Bill. On its own, it will not solve the problems of prisoners drinking while in custody or released on temporary licence, but it will give the Prison Service a method of accurately assessing whether a prisoner has consumed alcohol. There are many facilities available to prisoners

who are abusing alcohol. For example, Alcoholics Anonymous detoxification centres are available to help prisoners with an alcohol problem. However, the importance of the Bill is that it gives a means of effective discipline and authority to the prison officers who are responsible for maintaining proper order in prisons. I commend the Bill to the House.

1.6 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I support my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin). This is a useful Bill that will help to determine whether a prisoner has broken the conditions of his licence. Incidentally, drugs tests were recently introduced in prisons. I understand that they are successful and that there have been few difficulties in implementing them.

One benefit of testing is that it can identify prisoners with a drugs or drink problem, and they can then receive treatment. I am very interested in this subject. In fact, I spent a large part of last Friday in my local prison—Lincoln prison. I was let out without any problem. I received a great deal of local information that I want to share with the House. I have also contacted the Prison Officers Association and other organisations because it is important that we press my right hon. Friend the Minister on several points relating to the Bill, and this is an opportunity so to do.

The Home Office considers that no additional funding will be needed for testing. I want to press my right hon. Friend on that in my few brief remarks. I have seen press reports that an alcometer can cost in excess of £700. Apparently, one was bought by the governor of Hewell Grange, a country house prison in Redditch. That is disclosed in a report by Judge Stephen Tumim, the former chief inspector of prisons. He questioned the legality of making inmates take a test; hence this Bill.

In that report, prisoners are quoted as saying that, if someone is on a four-day leave, the ban on alcohol is virtually unenforceable. They may not drink on the final day, but they will drink as much as they want in the preceding days. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North has a solution to that; he probably does not. It is something that should worry us all.

We could solve some of the problems by taking urine samples, but the POA tells me that, if we insist on them, there could be considerable cost implications. That process also takes much longer. The prisoner has a right of appeal against a breath test. There is a concern that officers would have an additional duty placed on them when they are already under severe pressure. We want more information from my right hon. Friend the Minister about what exactly will be done in the routine procedures when prisoners return to prison and how much additional burden will be placed on prison officers.

There are no data on the number of prisoners found drunk, or on seizures of alcohol in prisons. The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys has found that there is a significantly higher level of drinking among prisoners prior to imprisonment than is the case in the general population. Indeed, it is four times higher.

I have spoken at length to representatives of the Prison Officers Association, and—although they are representatives of a trade union—presumably they know what they are talking about. They may have an axe to grind, but we should listen carefully to what they have to say about the Bill, and my right hon. Friend the Minister should reply to the points that they have made. They say that the Bill's most important provision is for testing prisoners returning from temporary licence, which would help deal with the rules being broken. They told me, however, that no extra resources would be provided to police such provision, and that there would be problems should testing prove to be time-consuming.

In the past 12 months, the number of prison officers has been reduced by 2,200—800 through natural wastage, and 1,400 through voluntary redundancy. New officers are being recruited only when it is vital to make replacements. During the same period, however, the prison population has increased. It has increased by 14,000 since the current Home Secretary assumed his duties, and it is rising by 250 to 300 a week. The effect of the rise on resources should worry us.

We all support what the Home Secretary is doing, and most of our constituents believe very strongly that the only way in which to deal with crime—which is endemic among younger people—is to put people in prison, but we must provide the necessary resources. If the number of prisoners is rising by 250 to 300 a week, that has very severe resource implications for the Home Office and for the Treasury.

Will prisons soon be at crisis point? The POA thinks that they will, although the Minister would undoubtedly deny it. I do not know—but we need some answers. Some people suggest that prisons will be at saturation level by next March or April; others suggest February. Some action is clearly required, and more officers will have to be recruited. Overcrowding does not affect private prisons, because there is a clause in their contracts stating that they cannot be overcrowded.

Is alcohol or drugs the main cause of disturbance in prisons? Are they the main problem affecting good order? Would the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North make a great deal of difference? On 8 September 1996, *The Sunday Times* quoted Mark Healey, a national executive member of the POA, as stating:

> "But it must be remembered that a main cause of disturbance in jail is overcrowding."

In October 1995, there was a disturbance at Coldingley prison in Surrey. Prisoners fought pitched battles with officers to defend a still in the kitchens, where more than 20 gallons of hooch were discovered.

Alcohol in prisons is a real problem, although it is not perhaps so severe as that of drugs. Drugs are used in prison either by those who are addicted to them or by those who use them as currency. As I observed last week during my visit, there is definitely a black market in drink and drugs in Lincoln prison. Prisoners make illicit drink in, perhaps, most prisons, and they can be very cunning in doing so. Last week, I saw some of the contraptions that they use to make drink and drugs in Lincoln prison.

In January 1996, in Wolds prison in east Yorkshire, stills were found behind panels in the television room. In Ashwell prison in Leicestershire, stills were found in the trunking behind a lavatory. In Leyhill open prison in Gloucestershire, six bottles of whisky, 53 bottles of cider and 40 bottles of beer were found. My hon. Friend's Bill will have some impact on dissuading prisoners from going

[Mr. Edward Leigh]

on a drinking spree in the few hours before they return from licence, but the examples I have given illustrate the main problem—what is happening inside prisons—which will not be solved by the Bill.

There are some very worrying statistics. A 1989 mental health survey found that 8.6 per cent. of prisoners had an alcohol dependency, whereas a 1995 study stated that 15 per cent. of prisoners had such a problem. In 1995, drug-testing trials were conducted and, in some gaols, it was discovered that two thirds of inmates tested positive. That percentage is staggering. Prisons are humane places—as I have seen for myself—in which prisoners are not put on a diet of bread and water, but people are supposed to be sent away to prison by society. We should pause for a moment and consider those percentages. The 1995 trial found that, in some gaols, two thirds of inmates tested positive for drugs. By the end of July this year, 34,496 prisoners had been tested, of whom 30 per cent. proved positive—23 per cent. for cannabis and 7 per cent. for heroin.

One hesitates to use a word like "crisis", but I do not think that the public know about these problems. They think that prisoners are locked away out of sight, out of mind, but if the statistics are true they should be a cause of great concern.

The Minister of State will rightly argue that funding for the Prison Service has increased, but I want to question him a little more closely about that. The Home Office recently announced its 1997 prison spending plans in the combined Budget and autumn statement, which said that funding for the Prison Service in 1997-98 will increase by £230 million on 1996-97 plans, with provision for 8,600 new prison places by March 2000.

That sounds like a lot of money and, at first sight, we might think that everything was fine, but when I rang the Prison Officers Association I was told that the increase was only £85 million. I therefore checked with the Library to see whether funding had indeed increased by £230 million, or by only £85 million. The Library told me that the true increase is only £111 million on the estimated expenditure for the last financial year. That is a cause for concern, and we need to be reassured that the necessary resources will be available.

Not only resources, but overcrowding, is the problem. New prisons—private prisons—are being built, and I welcome that, but there may be a need for even more. I am worried that the Home Office will decide to use the former RAF base at Scampton—in fact, it is still an RAF base, as it is used partly for married quarters, although the actual Air Force base has closed—as a prison. It might decide to use the Finningley base.

The rumour mill is working at fever pitch in Lincoln, and I am told that Scampton is off the hot list. I have written to my right hon. Friend the Minister about it. We need to know what is happening as soon as possible because the future of RAF Scampton could be blighted. I want to be reassured that, although the Home Office has use of Scampton, it will not persevere with the proposal to use it as a prison.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will be able to answer my questions. I welcome the Bill; it does no harm, but it does not get to the nub of the problem. We should be very concerned about what is happening in our prisons with regard to drugs and drink.

I am immensely impressed by the hard work that prison governors and officers put into running our prisons. From what I have seen, prisons are run humanely. Fundamentally, however, they deal with young men between the ages of 18 and 25—at least, they form the bulk of the prison population. If those young people are being corrupted wholesale not only with drink—although they might get over that—but with drugs, we should be very worried.

1.17 pm

Sir Roger Sims (Chislehurst): I should like to support the Bill and take this opportunity to remind my right hon. Friend the Minister of State of the report issued last year by the all-party group on alcohol misuse, which examined the links between alcohol and crime. Those links take several forms. The obvious one is that of young men having a night out, drinking too much and getting involved in crime. However, alcoholics may commit crime as a feature of their alcoholism or, in some cases, literally to feed their addiction. Evidence given to the group by the National Association of Probation Officers, and which stemmed from a survey it carried out in 1994, revealed that 58 per cent. of prisoners have severe alcohol problems. That is a worrying figure.

Some hon. Members may have heard of a report just issued in the *British Medical Journal* giving details of a survey on the mental health of remand prisoners. It found that 63 per cent. of them had psychiatric disorders, of whom 38 per cent. were involved in substance abuse. That includes drugs as well as alcohol, but it is certainly a substantial figure.

My hon. Friends the Members for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) and for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) have talked about the consequences of the Bill. There is no point in having the facilities suggested in the Bill unless action is taken on what the tests reveal. It is important that there should be treatment for those who are found to have an alcohol problem in prison.

I emphasise the need for such services in prison because the evidence shows that provision is woefully inadequate. Paragraph 9.13 of the all-party report that I have already mentioned says:

> "Several organisations giving evidence stressed that services are currently reaching too few people. Alcohol services may reach 20-30 people in prison populations of 800 and with massive throughputs."

The report comments on the desirability of a comprehensive assessment system for potential alcoholics in prisons and of proper services being available to them. In most parts of the country, local voluntary agencies would be able to assist with such work for a relatively modest cost. I sit on the management committee of a local alcohol advisory service that would be willing to co-operate.

Alcoholism is a real problem. It is particularly serious in prison. Where we have—literally—a captive audience for treatment, we should ensure that they get it.

1.21 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I, too, strongly support the Bill. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) on introducing it today. Like him, I was surprised that the power in question did not exist. We are well past the time when it should have been introduced.

I listened with great interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) and learned from his personal experience of being in prison for a day—some people think that he should be in for longer. He gave us an eloquent description of the extent of the alcohol problem in British prisons. The Bill has been drafted to deal with that. The aim is to have more effective means of controlling alcohol in prisons by making it possible to obtain the necessary evidence to pursue those who have clearly been drinking but cannot be brought to book, and by providing an enforceable deterrent.

We should consider briefly why alcohol and prisons do not mix. It might seem obvious, but the reasons need restating. First, the presence of alcohol in prisons runs against maintaining good order and discipline. For that reason, it should not be permitted. Secondly, prison is, in part, a punishment as well as a means of removing from circulation someone who is a danger to the public and a means of rehabilitation. It is hardly a punishment to put a prisoner behind bars and then allow him to live the life of Riley, replete with provisions of alcohol.

The public have rightly been offended by revelations in newspapers and elsewhere, along the lines described by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, that there is clear evidence of massive alcohol and drug abuse in certain prisons. Any steps that may reduce that abuse are welcome.

A third problem with alcohol in prisons is the way in which the prison mafia uses alcohol as a means of control, and as a means of exploitation and raising money. There are examples of groups of particularly tough criminals in prisons using alcohol to barter and as the basis of extending their influence and control. To that extent too, it is necessary to stamp out alcohol in prisons and the Bill will help us to do that.

I now have a question for my right hon. Friend the Minister. What will be the impact of the Bill running alongside the European convention on human rights? I know that the mandatory drug-testing regime has been questioned under the European convention. No cases have been successful so far, but there have been suggestions that mandatory drug testing runs foul of article 3 of the European convention, which refers to unnecessary and degrading punishment. I find it difficult to see how that argument can be sustained, but I know that there have been attempts to sustain it with respect to the taking of urine samples. Such testing is included in the Bill.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point, which was particularly put to me by the governor of Lincoln prison. Prisoners are immensely cunning about hiding drugs, many of which are received from visitors because it is easy for them to pass drugs over. If mandatory testing is not allowed, we shall not be able to stamp out the problem. If prisons had mandatory testing at regular intervals for drink and drugs, prisoners could be punished by being given extra time and we could thus get a grip on this huge problem.

Mr. Merchant: Yes. I should add that the Bill does not provide for random testing for alcohol. There has to be reasonable suspicion, although grounds for reasonable suspicion could include the smell of alcohol on someone's breath, which is fairly clear. However, that reasonable suspicion would need to be proved, which is what testing is about.

I mentioned article 3 of the European convention. Some may argue that article 8.1 brings into question the powers contained in the Bill. Article 8.1 refers to respect for a person, his family, his home and so on. Although article 8.2 limits the extent to which article 8.1 can be argued, it provides a possible area of contradiction to the Bill and that concerns me. I have some problems with the European convention in any case, especially as it is applied by a court outside this country. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister can assure me that, as far as he can best judge, there will not be a problem and that the Bill can be used effectively by those charged with responsibility for prisons without them fearing that someone will put a hand on their shoulder and prevent them from using a power that is necessary to maintain good order and the proper purpose of prisons.

1.28 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): The Government are grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) for introducing the Bill, which will give the Prison Service an additional method of controlling prisoners who consume alcohol in prison or while released on temporary licence.

Alcohol is a serious cause of concern to communities close to prisons, and can be the cause of violence and disorder within prisons. I congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing the Bill so ably this morning. When it is eventually passed, it will give us a better hold over the wrong things prisoners do in prisons or on temporary release.

Many prisoners have a history of alcohol abuse which has caused them to commit a range of criminal offences. Indeed, some are serving sentences for offences committed while under the influence of alcohol, and it is clearly in their interest and in the interest of the public to find some way of controlling their consumption.

Although it is impossible accurately to assess in how many cases an offence was committed because alcohol was consumed, a clear association has been established between alcohol and crimes of violence and disorder. In 1988, in response to a survey of 604 young offenders, 25 per cent. said that they were drunk when committing their current offence, while a further 16 per cent. had been drinking previously. Studies of violent offences and disorderly behaviour consistently show that 20 to 30 per cent. of such incidents take place in or near licensed premises. In the prison population, with its far higher proportion of violent and disorderly individuals, the consumption of alcohol can cause serious problems of order and control.

I should like to set out some of the background and recent events which have led to the introduction of the Bill.

[Mr. David Maclean]

During 1995, representations were received from the boards of visitors at HMP Ford and HMP Stanford Hill, who expressed concern that governors should be able to impose breathalyser tests on prisoners. Advice received at the time made it clear that the imposition of breath tests on prisoners was unlawful. That concern provided the spur for the proposed legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North and I were surprised at the existence of that gap in our legal powers.

Governors were made aware of the legal position and the substantial powers that they already possessed to control the more obvious cases of misuse of alcohol. They included the facility to include in the terms of a licence under which a prisoner may be temporarily released a condition to restrict—or in some cases, prohibit entirely—the consumption of alcohol.

In imposing such restrictions, each case has to be considered on its own merits as part of the risk assessment procedure that is applied to all such licences. A decision to prohibit all consumption of alcohol for all releases on temporary licence, whatever their purpose, may not be reasonable where there is no sign whatsoever that alcohol or loss of self-control has contributed in the past—or may contribute in the future—to offending behaviour by the individual. Where a prisoner has as the condition of his licence a condition prohibiting the consumption of alcohol or the excessive consumption of alcohol, he can be charged with breaching that licence if he returns to prison exhibiting signs of use of alcohol.

New conditions governing the release of prisoners on temporary licence were introduced in 1995. It is now a standard condition of all such licences that a prisoner must not enter a public house while he is subject to that licence. That condition was introduced as part of a number of measures to discourage inappropriate behaviour by prisoners released on temporary licence.

In addition, governors have existing powers for disciplinary action to be taken against prisoners if they are observed by a member of staff to be showing signs of being under the influence of alcohol. Those signs include slurred speech, loss of balance and breath smelling of alcoholic drink. Historically, prisoners showing signs of being under the influence of alcohol have always been subject to a charge if they commit a disciplinary offence while under the influence of alcohol.

The most common alcohol-related examples relate to prisoners who are clearly rowdy or disorderly. I such cases, paragraph 21 of the disciplinary code, which relates to

"offending against good order and discipline",

can be used, provided that it can be demonstrated exactly how the prisoner offended against good order and discipline, introducing the consumption of alcohol as an aggravating factor in such a charge.

Prison establishments also had the authority to introduce a local rule prohibiting the consumption of alcohol within the establishment. In those circumstances, prisoners who exhibited signs of being under the influence of alcohol and were known to have been subject to prison or young offenders institution rules when the alcohol was consumed could then be charged under paragraph 20 with failing to comply with any rule or regulation.

In response to the concerns that had been raised, and pending the provision of primary legislation for the purpose of testing prisoners for alcohol, in September 1996 we introduced new disciplinary offences relating to alcohol consumption into the prison discipline manual. The new paragraph 8B provides a charge that a prisoner is intoxicated wholly or partly as a consequence of knowingly consuming any alcoholic beverage. That is the more serious of the two new disciplinary charges. It concerns the prisoner who is clearly intoxicated, in contrast to the one who may merely have consumed a small amount of alcohol.

In order to be satisfied of guilt, the adjudicator would have to be convinced beyond reasonable doubt that the accused was intoxicated. Presently, if, after hearing the evidence, the adjudicator is convinced that the accused's behaviour was elated beyond the point of self-control, that will satisfy the test of intoxication. It is not sufficient evidence for a finding of guilt if it is demonstrated that the behaviour was caused merely by sky-larking or an excess of high spirits.

Paragraph 8C of the new disciplinary manual cites the second, less serious new disciplinary offence. It provides a charge for a prisoner who knowingly consumes alcohol other than any prescribed to him pursuant to a written order of the medical officer under prison rule 22 or YOI rule 18. That charge concerns the prisoner who, although not intoxicated, has knowingly consumed alcohol that had not been prescribed for him or her.

For the charge to be proven, the adjudicator has to be satisfied, among other things, that the observed behaviour was the consequence of consuming alcoholic beverage. It is not necessary to prove intoxication, and the evidence should be such that it would lead a reasonable and right-thinking person to conclude that the accused had consumed alcohol.

I make no apologies for describing the present disciplinary rules, because—my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North said that it came as some surprise to him—there appeared to be a lacuna of not being able to force prisoners to undertake alcohol tests. I wanted to show the House that the Prison Service has done all that it possibly can to draw to the attention of prisoners the fact that the consumption of alcohol will not be permitted, and they will face serious disciplinary charges if they are caught drinking alcohol. It is absolutely right that we have taken those powers to try to plug the gap until we can take the new statutory powers to give the Prison Service a right to test prisoners for alcohol.

I hope that I have given the House sufficient background to make clear the context in which the powers to enable prison officers to require a prisoner to provide a sample for the purposes of testing for alcohol will have real value.

The introduction of two new prison rules specifically concerning charges relating to the consumption of alcohol has already assisted in enabling prison staff to lay charges appropriate to the offending behaviour that they have observed. Formal testing, enabled through the powers to be conferred by the Bill, will provide objective evidence that will greatly assist the proving of charges through the adjudication process in any case where there is a suspicion that alcohol has been misused.

It will be as good a breakthrough in the Prison Service as the breathalyser was in improving police methods of testing motorists. Previously, motorists had to walk along white lines or try to touch their nose with their finger, and all such stuff.

The Bill will enable a prison officer to require a prisoner to provide a sample of breath for the purposes of ascertaining whether they have any alcohol in their body. In addition, a prison officer will also be enabled to require a prisoner to provide a sample of urine or any non-intimate sample—such as sweat or non-pubic hair—for the same purpose. The power is defined in that manner so that the most cost-effective use can be made of technological advances that may assist the testing process and are consistent with our needs.

Mr. Leigh: The governor of Lincoln prison told me that the problem with drugs arises from not being able to conduct intimate searches. Prisoners often swallow drugs in condoms and by one or two other means. Until prison officers and governors can make intimate searches, we shall never deal with the problem; yet, if we were to introduce such a power through a Bill or a new regulation, the European Court of Justice would immediately intervene. How does my right hon. Friend think that we can make progress on that front?

Mr. Maclean: I was going to deal later in my speech with the points my hon. Friend raises, but since he mentions drugs, I will talk about them now. We have introduced the mandatory drug testing regime. It is giving us useful information that we did not have before, and has identified the scale of the problem.

I do not agree with my hon. Friend that the solution to the problem necessarily lies in giving prison officers the power to conduct intimate searches for drugs. That takes the defeatist view, although I am sure my hon. Friend did not mean to do so, that drugs will inevitably get to prisoners, and that the only way to stop it is by having intimate searches.

We can stop more drugs getting to prisoners as a first step, and that has been done through the use of sniffer dogs. While the Prison Service is not my area of ministerial responsibility, I think I am right in saying that nearly every prison now has a sniffer dog at its doorstep to discourage people from bringing in drugs. If not all prisons have such dogs yet, the vast majority do. A civil servant told me that they had an amazing effect, because, when relatives visited their loved ones in prison and saw the sniffer dog, many suddenly decided they had to go back to their cars. Perhaps they had left some important item there, or the "present" they were bringing their loved one was no longer thought appropriate.

Measures to stop drugs getting into prisons are crucial. They may include more closed visits, more restrictions on loved ones meeting in prisons, or treatment of those prisoners identified as having drug problems. Many prisoners are voluntarily keen to dry out, and the drug-free wings are having considerable success. At the moment, I do not see that the lack of a power of intimate search is defeating our objectives on the prison drug problem.

Mr. Leigh: If, after all the measures are fully implemented, they are found not to be effective, will my right hon. Friend consider reopening the issue of intimate searches? Incidentally, in my earlier intervention I mentioned the European Court of Justice, but I meant, of course, the European Court of Human Rights.

Mr. Maclean: I was not going to pick up my hon. Friend on that point, because I know that he holds both courts in equally high esteem—as do I, of course. I can assure my hon. Friend that, once we have implemented all the measures on drugs, we will keep the possible need for further measures under constant review.

The restrictions on intimate searching apply not only to prison officers, but to police officers. Most police and prison officers do not want the power of intimate searching, because they are not skilled at it. It should be left to medical practitioners or skilled nurses, and they regard it as essential to their oath of practice that they have the consent of the person who is being intimately searched. Such powers would have ECHR implications, and I do not wish to go into those today. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) is right to flag up the issue as a potential problem, but I believe that we can avoid it.

In testing for alcohol, the marvellous advantage of the breathalyser is that it cannot have any ECHR implications—a point about which my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) expressed concern. The Bill will allow not only testing via the breathalyser, but various other types of sample to be taken.

We have put that provision in the Bill because, although the breathalyser now seems the best, easiest and cheapest bet, technologies change rapidly, and urine testing may turn out to be a cheaper method in the future. In the future, we may be able to take an alcohol analysis accurately and cheaply from a sample of hair, although that is not possible now. If it becomes possible, we will have the appropriate powers in the Bill.

There may be ECHR implications in taking urine samples, but we have checked carefully, and we believe that the Bill does not flout any ECHR rules. We shall monitor carefully the implementation rules for prisoners giving urine samples to ensure that they do not fall foul of the ECHR, and also to ensure that the urine sample is not substituted by some other liquid and the purpose of the test defeated. Recently, the courts have been robust on that. They have ruled that there is no invasion of personal privacy if a prison officer is present and scrutinises the delivery of such a sample. I do not think the House would wish me to go into any more detail—I certainly do not particularly want to.

I want to correct a slight misapprehension that my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham had. He said that the testing in the Bill will take place only where there is reasonable suspicion. That is not true. The Bill gives a general power to take samples and to carry out testing in general.

When the Bill is passed, however, it will be our intention to keep the random testing powers for use in prisons where there may be a particular problem, and therefore where random testing may be appropriate. In the main, however, random testing will take place in the 13 open prisons where there is a greater alcohol misuse problem. In those circumstances, we will be targeting it and using the test of reasonable suspicion in the prison rules.

[Mr. Maclean]

I think that I have dealt with most of the points that my hon. Friends have raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle asked about the funding position. He is right. Alcometers or testing machines cost about £600 apiece, and the breathalyser sample bags, or whatever, are about £2 each; but we are not talking about installing this equipment overnight in 130 prisons and testing 50,000 prisoners.

The problem exists not in all but in some of the 13 open prisons. We will consider them first. We will need to invest £600 in the machine and £2 in each breathalyser in some of those prisons, to deal with some of the prisoners who may be causing the problem. The resource implications, therefore, are not great, and they can be dealt with within the Prison Service's overall budget.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: My right hon. Friend is talking about the use of breathalysers as the normal method for testing for alcohol. Does he agree with the advice that I have taken, that there is no question of the use of a breathalyser falling foul of the European Court of Human Rights? Even if the prisoner initially refuses to give a breath sample, he can be compelled to give one, without any possibility of it being used as an invasion of his privacy or degrading treatment in a state institution.

Mr. Maclean: I happily confirm that. The ECHR could be called in only in relation to taking urine samples from prisoners and the prisoner being watched by a prison officer while the sample was taken. A breath test could in no way fall foul of any of the ECHR's provisions in relation to rights to privacy.

Powers to test prisoners for alcohol are a logical extension of the powers already in force for mandatory drug testing enacted by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. The MDT insertion into the Prison Act 1952 has been invaluable in helping the service to identify the size of the problem of drug taking in prisons. As I have said, it has gone some way to help reduce the misuse of drugs in prison, as part of the overall strategy to reduce drug misuse there. I hope that this Bill will in its turn go some way towards reducing alcohol misuse in prisons.

The need for this new power and to curb the problems mentioned earlier has, as I have already said, been identified by Prison Service staff and by boards of visitors at prisons, especially open prisons and others that may have prisoners released on temporary licence. It is in the open prisons where it is relatively easy to bring alcohol into the prison. That is because the low level of security and the use of temporary release facilitate the smuggling of alcohol.

It is much more difficult in closed prisons, owing to their higher level of security, stronger physical barriers and greater emphasis on searching and related procedures. Sometimes, however, there are finds of illicitly brewed alcohol, or hooch, at establishments with higher security.

Final decisions have yet to be made about the process through which these powers will be implemented in Prison Service establishments. It may be sensible to commence that process at those open and lower-security establishments where a clear need has already been identified. The Bill will provide powers for samples to be taken in any Prison Service establishment in England and Wales. The circumstances under which the powers will be used, together with ancillary matters, will be set out in the prison rules.

The consumption of alcohol by prisoners who are released on temporary licence has in the past caused problems for innocent people in the community, friends and families of prisoners who are released on temporary licence, other prisoners in open prisons who are trying to get off alcohol and who may be pushed into temptation, and the prison staff who have to deal with prisoners who are under the influence of alcohol. The introduction of formal testing will send a clear message to prisoners that the consumption of alcohol within prisons—or whilst released on a temporary licence with the condition of not consuming alcohol—will not be tolerated.

The Bill will make it less likely that prisoners will succumb to the excessive consumption of alcohol when they are released on temporary licence. This in turn should provide reassurance to the public, and will send a signal that, while prisons should be decent but austere, prisoners are not there to get ready access to alcohol. If they are released on licence to do good work in the community and to participate in employment before being released properly into the community, we do not want them coming back to prison under the influence of alcohol.

Unfortunately, there are examples of that happening, and there are tales that one could tell about prisoners returning to prison the worse for wear. That is unfortunate, and prison officers use all their power to try to stop it.

I have described the rules and disciplinary charges that will be in force. By bringing in a simple and easy method of measuring whether prisoners have been on the booze or not, the Bill will immensely help the Prison Service to crack down on the problem. The Bill will provide excellent measures in addition to those already taken by the Prison Service to tackle the problems which can arise from the consumption of alcohol by prisoners.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North gave a full description of the main contents of the Bill, and I shall not repeat them. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle referred to RAF Scampton, but I cannot give him a reply today. I will draw his remarks to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, who will deal with them in due course in the nicest possible way. The Government warmly welcome the Bill and wish it well during the remainder of its passage through the House and another place.

1.51 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) on introducing the Bill. I believe that he acts as a sort of stepfather for the legislation—perhaps he is a godfather, I am not sure. He will have been pleased by the response of the Minister, and I am glad that I can also respond positively to the Bill.

The hon. Member argued persuasively that prisons should be austere but well-ordered places, but I do not recognise the picture he painted as the atmosphere of all the prisons that I have visited. There is a considerable variety in atmosphere and regime in prisons, and some prisons are neither decent nor austere. The reduction of education in prisons, the limits of probation service

involvement, the failure to prepare prisoners for release under the pressure of overcrowding and cuts in cash are having an impact on the effectiveness of some prisons in the key objective of returning prisoners to the community, having served their sentence, less likely to offend again. There is always the danger that prisons may turn out ex-offenders who are more likely to re-offend, and to reoffend more seriously. That is not an argument for being soft, but it is an argument for being effective.

The Bill will help in one area of organisation and discipline. It is a small but important step, rather than the solution to the problem—as, I am sure, the hon. Member for Colchester, North will acknowledge. It has been difficult to be sure about the extent of the problem, although I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is serious. In trying to find out the extent of the problem, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones), asked the Home Secretary in 1994 to give

"the number of those with drug or alcohol problems currently being held in prison in the United Kingdom."

The responsibility for answering was diverted to the Director General of the Prison Service, who answered in this way:

"During 1993 the Home Office Addicts Index was notified of 3,764 drug addicts identified by prison medical officers within the United Kingdom. Prisoners addicted to alcohol are not reflected within this figure.

There are currently no central records of the number of alcohol addicted prisoners in England and Wales."—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1994; Vol. 250, c. 558-59.]

In his speech, the Minister of State said that the picture of drug dependency in prisons is now known a great deal more accurately as a result of the testing allowed under recent legislation, but the situation in relation to alcohol remains unclear.

The report published in the *British Medical Journal* today shows that a high proportion of prisoners with psychiatric problems also have alcohol and drug problems. Sir David Ramsbotham told the "Today" programme, which seems to have received a remarkable amount of attention from the House this morning, that many prisoners in the categories covered in the report were made worse by prison. I hope that that gives a greater impetus for hon. Members on both sides of the House to tackle the problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Selly Oak asked in February 1995:

"how many finds of illicit alcohol were made in gaols in England and Wales for each year since 1990."

Again, the reply was delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who responded:

"This information is not routinely kept by the Prison Service."—[*Official Report*, 27 February 1995; Vol. 255, c. 408.]

The hon. Member for Chislehurst (Sir R. Sims) referred to the report of the all-party group on alcohol misuse, in which he has played a leading part since we re-formed it a few years ago. As a former chairman of that group, I thought the report an excellent initiative by the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), who now chairs the group. The hearings were an education in themselves, the report was excellent and I commend the hon. Member for Chislehurst for his involvement and for the fact that he highlighted that valuable report in his contribution today.

The report is one of a number of serious and thoughtful analyses of the relationship between alcohol and crime, to which we need to give far greater attention. Much attention is rightly paid to the problem of drugs and drug-related crime, and we need to be much more focused in our attention to alcohol-related crime.

The report published today in the *British Medical Journal* refers to some 63 per cent. of remand prisoners having psychiatric problems of one sort or another, 9 per cent. being people who ought to be in special hospitals and a high proportion of all of those prisoners having drug and alcohol problems. That finding was based on an extensive piece of work involving three young offenders' institutions and 13 men's prisons.

The basic conclusion of the report was:

"Mental disorder was common among male unconvicted prisoners. Psychosis was present at four or five times the level found in the general population. Extrapolation of our results suggests that remand population as a whole probably contains about 680 men who need transfer to hospital for psychiatric treatment, including about 380 prisoners with serious mental illness."

The *British Medical Journal* also referred to an article in the publication "Medical Science Law", entitled "Alcohol-related offending in male special hospital patients", which said:

"Alcohol abusers were responsible for a disproportionately high number of offences of murder and manslaughter."

That underlines the fact that the issue that we are dealing with is important, although the legislation is narrow and extremely targeted.

Reference has already been made to the governor of an open prison who purchased equipment because prisoners were returning from temporary release the worse for drink, and to the fact that the chief inspector of prisons questioned the legality of making inmates take a test. It is welcome that the Bill deals with that question of legality.

Many other steps need to be taken to deal satisfactorily with the problem. Organisations such as the Prison Reform Trust have argued that work with young problem drinkers and drug users should be oriented towards their release from prison and that a release package including a stay at a detoxification unit may be suitable in some cases.

When I spoke to the chief constable in Edinburgh last year, expecting to concentrate mainly on drug-related crime, I was impressed by the way in which he and his colleagues strongly underlined the impact of drink and drink-related offences on their work.

In addition to the findings of organisations such as the all-party group, which was referred to earlier, the Home Office has produced its own findings. In 1987, the working group on young people and alcohol said:

"Studies of violent offences, and of disorderly behaviour falling short of serious violence, coming to the notice of the police, consistently show that 20-30 per cent of the incidents take place in or near licensed premises. Studies in several city centres in England and Wales have showed that almost half the incidents of disorderly behaviour dealt with by the police occur shortly after the end of permitted drinking hours".

Against that background, the way in which offenders are dealt with in prison becomes important. We must make it more likely that people on leaving prison do not behave in a way that takes them back into offending.

The Bill is important and helpful, but I want to underline the fact that the report in the *British Medical Journal* shows in stark terms that a great deal needs to be done on treatment and rehabilitation of offenders, and that much more of that should be done in prisons. There is a particular need to do a great deal more in respect of the

[Mr. Alun Michael]

psychiatric treatment of prisoners but, as the parliamentary questions to which I referred earlier demonstrate, not enough attention has been given to research, collation of information and monitoring of the problems of alcohol misuse among the prison population.

I commend and support the Bill, but I hope that it will be used, as the Minister said that testing for drug misuse had been used, to ensure that in the future we have a clear and accurate picture of what is happening in our prisons, so that Governments can develop policies to target the real problems inside and outside prison.

2.2 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: I thank all those who have contributed to the debate and supported the Bill, especially my hon. Friends the Members for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), for Chislehurst (Sir R. Sims) and for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant), my right hon. Friend the Minister, and the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael). I look forward to the Bill going to Committee. I intend to visit Chelmsford prison, the nearest prison to my constituency, next week, and I hope that we shall have an informed debate.

I offer the House one further thought about how the powers of the Bill might be circumscribed by the obligations that we feel towards the European convention on human rights. Article 8, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham referred, states:

"Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence."

That is an invocation with which nobody in a civilised democracy could conceivably disagree. That is why, under the late Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill, we subscribed to that convention. He would be turning in his grave if he thought that the convention, which was meant to stop Nazis and communists persecuting people in dictatorships, was being used to prevent legitimate authorities from imposing order and discipline on criminals in prisons. To describe that as a breach of fundamental human rights would stretch the imagination even of judges.

I am surprised that so many legal brains are taken in by such distortions. If such restrictions on our laws, on discipline in prisons, on how police act in police stations and on how teachers are allowed to act in schools continues, the growing scepticism that my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor has expressed towards the European Commission on Human Rights will be justified. We should not allow the Bill's powers to be circumscribed in the way that some people have advised.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Telecommunications (Fraud) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.5 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I declare a pecuniary interest as an adviser to the Telecommunications Managers Association, but I must make it clear that the TMA has not in any way been involved in promoting or drafting the Bill.

This is an interesting day to introduce the Bill because my mobile phone, if I may mention that terrible beast, has been going mad all the way to Westminster with people asking me whether a prison ship is to be based in my constituency. I shall certainly congratulate the Home Office if it brings 200 new jobs and 500 new prison places to a bay near me. To judge from the Bills that we have discussed this morning, the 500 extra places may be needed. However, I hope that hon. Members agree that the purpose of increasing penalties and the ability of the police to catch offenders is to stop crimes being committed in the first place.

My Bill has a long history. It has been acknowledged for many years that the Telecommunications Act 1984 has two small, but fundamental, flaws. Section 42 deals with dishonestly obtaining a telecommunications service, but does not outlaw equipment used for that purpose. The example most readily understood—there are many other more complicated ones that we will not want to discuss today—involves changing the electronic serial number of a mobile phone. That can happen to people whose phones are stolen, but it can also happen to anyone who owns one. Once the number is changed, people can dial calls and have them charged to someone else's bill. There are many ways to ensure that someone else pays for calls. Under section 42, the police have to prove that someone has been dishonestly obtaining a service. People who are good at the fraud can ensure that there is no evidence of that, by charging calls to someone else's bill.

Clause 1 provides that a person will be guilty of an offence if he has in his custody or control anything that he intends to use to obtain a service dishonestly, or which he intends dishonestly to allow others to use. The possession of equipment that has no sensible purpose other than the commission of fraud will mean that an offence has automatically been committed.

The second flaw of the 1984 Act is that it provided for only a two-year maximum penalty on indictment. There have already been frauds of more than £2 million on the telecommunications system. Such massive fraud requires sufficiently high penalties. My Bill would increase the penalty to five years and ensure that police have additional automatic powers to enter premises if they have a reasonable suspicion that such crime is being committed. They would be able to enter in hot pursuit, rather than have to find a magistrate, get a warrant and return to catch somebody red-handed. The Bill would therefore be extremely helpful to the police in tackling the crime.

The Government have for many years acknowledged that there is a problem, but they have said to the industry, "Go away and try to solve it with the existing legislation." After some years and a lot of discussion, it has been agreed between the Government and the industry that the only answer is presented by the Bill.

For some time, the joint industry and Government study group has examined the problem. I congratulate the Department of Trade and Industry on including the industry in its confidential discussions and on helping to develop the Bill. I should particularly like to praise the work of the Federation of Communication Services and, if she does not blush too much, Jacqui Brookes, who has worked tirelessly for years to find a solution. She has kept us all pointing in the same direction. Hundreds of people have been involved in the process, and it would take too long to mention them all, but I congratulate them and all the sponsors of the Bill. This is an all-party measure that has attracted a great deal of support on both sides of the House. I therefore believe that we can proceed confidently with it.

I intend to ask the House's leave to take the Bill through all its stages now. We have tried to do the best job that we can to give maximum publicity to the Bill's intentions. Many hon. Members will have seen consumer programmes and other features on television which demonstrate that everyone wants the Bill to go through. I have not received one letter, message, e-mail, telephone call or any other communication against the Bill.

Given that we have ensured that the maximum number of people are aware of the intentions behind the Bill, I believe that it would be safe for it to complete all its stages today—if that was the House's will. The urgency of the matter requires that that should happen.

2.11 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) on the Bill. The Labour party welcomes it and will co-operate in its passage. We support any sensible anti-crime measure, and we are pleased that the hon. Gentleman has taken the opportunity to introduce a Bill on telecommunications fraud.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it would be sensible to complete the Bill's stages, if that is possible, before the Government are forced to call a general election. The Government will lose their parliamentary majority on Monday, following the success of our candidate, Jeffrey Ennis, at the Barnsley, East by-election, so I understand why the Government and the hon. Gentleman might be anxious for the Bill to complete all its stages now, with the House's leave. It is clear that, from Monday, the Government will have some difficulty ensuring the passage of their legislation.

Why is it necessary to have the Bill now? Owing to a loophole in existing legislation, the possession of equipment used to perpetrate telephone fraud is not an arrestable offence. It is yet another example—we see many of them—of technology moving more rapidly than legislation. The Telecommunications Act 1984 was drafted when the mobile phone industry had only just begun to develop. The scanners now used in mobile telephony frauds did not even exist.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): I moved an amendment to the Bill that became the 1984 Act to ban scanning radios, but the Government opposed it.

Mr. Hoon: That demonstrates my hon. Friend's foresight and how he was ahead of the technology.

[Mr. Hoon]

Perhaps the Government were lagging behind. That is not a particularly new piece of information for hon. Members who debate technology in the House.

It is appropriate that we should attempt to tighten our legislation. Efforts have already been made in that respect in the United States and Hong Kong. I am told that, in China, anyone convicted of cloning a mobile telephone may face the death penalty. I sincerely hope that the DTI does not communicate that information to the current Home Secretary.

There is a temptation sometimes, and in some quarters, to see hacking as a prank perpetrated by clever students at the expense of a bungling bureaucracy. The reality of telephone fraud is that it is perpetrated by highly organised criminal gangs using sophisticated high-tech equipment. Once upon a time, such equipment was expensive, but it can now be bought on the high street for as little as £100, allowing mobile telephones to be reprogrammed.

The extent of the crime involved is, perhaps inevitably, difficult to calculate, but the industry suggests that at least 8,000 analogue telephones were cloned every week of last year. Certainly about 20,000 were reported stolen. Phone hacking is costing the country hundreds of millions of pounds a year. Estimates are necessarily unreliable, but a figure of £200 million a year has been mentioned.

The electronic sophistication of telephone equipment has given rise to sophistication in equal measure among those who are trying to abuse equipment for criminal purposes. A wide variety of techniques are employed. I do not propose to go through them in detail, but it is important to note that they do not apply simply to mobile telephony. These days, sophisticated fixed-wire systems offer facilities such as voice mail and 0800 numbers that can be used effectively only if authorised members of staff can call in and change the settings on their telephone systems. Some of those facilities can be abused by outsiders, who change the settings.

Telephone hackers gain access to an office telephone system, and sell access numbers to third parties who then sell them on to others who want to use the opportunity to make expensive international calls. That means that, in effect, businesses are subsidising the costs of crime. Indeed, larger businesses, which may already have substantial international telephone traffic, may not become aware for a long time of the fact that their systems are being abused.

As everyone recognises, a particular problem for mobile telephony is that the latest equipment apparently allows criminals the mobile telephone numbers of hundreds of pieces of equipment being used within a 1 km sq area. Those numbers are then sold on, often to those who have perpetrated crimes by stealing mobile phones. I am told that they are hired out for £5 for 15 minutes in pubs and clubs, thereby allowing people to run up bills of hundreds of pounds—bills that are then passed back to the victims of the original theft.

It is important to make a further point in the context of efforts to control crime. We are not concerned only with eliminating the cost to the country of defrauding telephone systems. It needs to be borne in mind that stolen clone telephones are frequently used in the commission of other offences, notably drug dealing and money laundering. It is estimated that thefts of mobile phones from parked cars contribute about 40 per cent. of city centre car break-ins. It is part of a wider criminal problem that we need to identify.

I congratulate the hon. Member for South Dorset. He is making a valuable contribution to a campaign throughout the country to stop crime—a campaign that has the full support of the Labour party.

2.18 pm

The Minister for Science and Technology (Mr. Ian Taylor): I warmly welcome the initiative of my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) in introducing this Bill and clearly explaining its purposes. I also welcome the contribution by the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) in support of the Bill. It is good to have cross-party amity on a Friday. I am sure that that will continue right through Christmas and beyond. My only caution to the hon. Gentleman in getting excited about the Bill is that it has to go through another place. I hope that he will use his constructive influence there before he gets involved in any other changes that he wants to propose for the other House. We would like the Bill to go through all its stages in both Houses as soon as possible. It is a sensible addition to the armoury of those attempting to fight fraud in the rapidly changing telecommunications era.

The "loophole"—as the hon. Member for Ashfield described it—was not left open by lack of foresight but by the difficulty of foreseeing technological change. The Telecommunications Act 1984 was passed in 1984, and the first mobile telephone call by Vodaphone was made on 1 January 1986. There are now 6 million mobile telephone users in the United Kingdom, and, by 2000, the figure is predicted to rise to between 12 and 15 million users. It is a remarkable success story, and the growth was based on private sector initiative and sensible management of the radio spectrum—for which I pay tribute to the Radiocommunications Agency.

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North–East): The Minister mentioned the Bill's importance for the mobile telephone industry. Will he confirm that the cable communications industry also awaits the powers that the Bill will provide it to combat fraud?

Mr. Taylor: I entirely endorse the hon. Gentleman's comments. The Bill—although initially identified as an urgent necessity by the mobile communications industry—deals with telecommunications fraud in its broadest sense, whether such fraud is by cable or by other, fixed-link operators.

Overall revenue for all telecommunications operators in the UK is about £13 billion, and there are 28 million-plus customers. The hon. Member for Ashfield said that each week 20,000 mobile telephones are stolen. Thefts put customers at personal risk from mugging and cost them—not least in insurance—to replace. Telephone thefts from parked cars have contributed to 40 per cent. of car break-ins in city centres, and therefore lead to much of the casual crime that so upsets our constituents.

Telephone cloning is a major problem. We estimate that, last year, an average of 8,000 analogue telephones were cloned each month, which is a 100 per cent. increase on the previous year. The costs of cloning inevitably and

ultimately feed back in higher charges to customers, although deals are often done to ensure that customers are isolated from any excessive bills that may suddenly crop up in their account.

Criminals now resort to high-technology fraud, which they consider to be low-risk. New devices to defraud the industry are appearing on our streets, and new names are being coined, such as "grabbers", "tumblers", "dongles" and "magic phones". The terms now form part of our lexicon, with which we were unfamiliar when drafting the Telecommunications Act 1984, and the new devices present serious difficulties for those who are attempting to eradicate fraud.

"Grabbers" can trigger a mobile telephone and cause it to transmit its identity, which is then used to create a clone. Cloners are also using "dongles", which are about the size of a matchbox and can be used rapidly to reprogramme and change the identity of a stolen telephone. We have heard of so-called "magic phones", in the far east, which grab the identity numbers of nearby telephones and use them to make cloned calls. The identities are subsequently discarded.

Such developments mean that we must introduce new legislation to combat them. As we move into the era of digital telephones, cloning will probably be more difficult. Sadly, however, we should never underestimate the skill of those employed in criminal activities, and we must prepare, so far as possible, to anticipate new difficulties. I compliment the industry on taking significant action to prevent fraud, such as its crime prevention scheme—which it introduced at its own initiative—and its urging telephone owners to protect their equipment, not least by marking it.

My hon. Friend's Bill is designed to ensure that we can win the battle against criminals, who—as hon. Members who have spoken in this debate have said—make use of free telephone calls, which they sometimes sell widely as packages. Criminals encourage dealers to obtain commissions for new connections that should not be made, and they provide anonymity to drug dealers and to money launderers.

As I said, the Bill rightly covers all forms of telecommunications fraud, not just that suffered by mobile phone operators. I am thinking of activities such as dial-through fraud, where hackers get into a PABX system in order to make international calls, which is clearly a great expense for honest phone owners.

The Bill specifically does not affect those who have no intent to defraud—it targets only the fraudsters. It creates two new offences covering the possession or supply of anything capable of use in dishonestly obtaining a telecommunications service with intent to avoid payment. In the Government's view, the existing penalties are too low to deter organised criminals who are committing large-scale fraud. I am therefore pleased that the Bill sets the maximum penalties for these new offences at five years rather than the current arrangements, in much more loosely defined circumstances, which provide for two.

I am confident that the Bill will be a major deterrent to the increasing number of criminals who regard telecommunications fraud as an easy, relatively risk-free and highly profitable activity. It will hit the criminals where it hurts and be of major benefit to the police.

In this newly advancing industry, it is important to reassure members of the public—I think that the Bill will help to do just that. In many aspects of the developing information society, we are endeavouring to ensure that, as technology advances, people have the confidence and reassurance that they can use it as a practical addition to their scope for communication but also in such a way that they are not left vulnerable to new crimes or, indeed, costs.

I have consulted many people in the industry about these matters. Indeed, we were hoping to develop further action plans when we found that my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset was lucky enough to draw a top position in the private Members' ballot and had the initiative to introduce the Bill. His drafting skill means that we have no objections to it.

Of course, the Bill needs to be set against the wider background of the development of the information society. Telecommunications themselves have been dramatically transformed since our liberalisation measures in 1984. There are now 150 licensed telecommunications operators; the real cost of a package of telecommunication calls has fallen by 40 per cent.; and there have obviously been quality improvements and new systems such as call divert and call monitoring, which can themselves however make systems vulnerable to criminal activity. Nevertheless, so long as we can reassure the consumer that we are taking action in that respect, there is no doubt that these call improvements and enhancements are of great benefit to the great British public.

We have also established our position internationally, not only with mobiles, where the GSN code has become the worldwide standard thanks to the research and development that took place in this country, but in terms of the fall in the cost of international telecommunications. I hope to be able to announce a series of licences for international telecommunications which will open the UK market to much more competition, thereby reducing the cost of international communications and attracting inward investment, which will be welcomed by all hon. Members.

The fact is often neglected that the telecommunications infrastructure—and thus the ability to get high-quality reliable services at an increasingly competitive cost—is one of the principal features in attracting inward investment into this country. Often it ranks only second, third or fourth in the list of priorities.

The Government's initiatives have enabled us to develop and deliver one of the most effective telecommunications systems anywhere in the world and to attract a huge amount of inward investment, not least from north America. That in turn has stimulated industrial production, the development of technology and an improvement in the quality of services.

The telecommunications revolution is itself the backbone of the information society, leading to convergence and not only increasing the ability of the telecommunications networks to interface but enabling even mobile telephony to integrate back into computing systems. We also have the ability to monitor a series of laptop computers using mobile telephony rather than fixed links telephony.

In the expansion of these technologies and the ability ultimately to allow even broadcast signals to come up on a laptop computer—and certainly on a personal

computer—as on to a television set, we need to ensure that at each stage we are one step ahead of the criminal. The Bill will help us in that process.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. I. Bruce.*]

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading), *and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (GAELIC NAMES) (SCOTLAND) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Spring.*]

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading), *and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

HORSERACE TOTALISATOR BOARD BILL [*Lords*]

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

THEFT (AMENDMENT) BILL [*Lords*]

Read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Graham.*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Before I leave the Chair, I have to make a short statement to the House. Occupants of the Chair have in the past deprecated proceeding at once from Second Reading to Committee if the Bill has only recently been printed. In this case, I should inform the House that the Bill was published yesterday, 12 December.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading), *and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

NORTHERN IRELAND ARMS DECOMMISSIONING BILL

Ordered,

That, during the proceedings on the Northern Ireland Arms Decommissioning Bill, Standing Committee B shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

EUROPEAN STANDING COMMITTEES

Ordered,

That European Community Document COM(96)641, relating to Fisheries: total allowable catches and quotas 1997, shall not stand referred to European Standing Committee A.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 16th December, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 14B (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents), the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to Fisheries not later than Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 18th December, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until she shall have notified the Royal Assent to Acts agreed upon by both Houses.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

Genetically Engineered Food

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ottaway.]*

2.35 pm

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I am pleased to be able to introduce this Adjournment debate, even though it is on a Friday afternoon. I apologise to the Minister for keeping her from her constituency.

This morning, we had an excellent debate on the banning of the carrying of knives, a matter on which the House was in total agreement. Nevertheless, knives are palpable things—the danger can be seen and can at least be tackled. The ingredients in our food may, in the long term, be just as dangerous, but we cannot see them. Our first defence must be Government vigilance on our behalf, and our second must be effective labelling. Food is an enormous subject which I cannot hope to cover in the time available, so I intend to concentrate chiefly on labelling, and on the recent anxieties about genetically modified soya and maize.

The House of Commons research document on genetically modified food, which was printed in June 1994, and is perhaps due for an update shortly, refers to a graphic article in *The Independent* of October 1993 about a group of German chefs who illustrated their concern about the issue by constructing the following menu. The starter would be smoked trout fillet with the gene for human growth hormone and a tomato salad with the flounder fish gene. To follow, there would be grilled chicken with the bovine growth hormone gene and a baked potato with the scorpion gene. Melon with a virus gene would be the dessert. At the time, all those foods had been developed and field-tested. All of them are transgenic.

The range of genetically engineered foods is enormous, from tomatoes that do not rot quickly to salmon that are infertile and do not want to migrate, and fish in Canada that are growing human insulin. I do not suggest that all those developments are harmful—indeed, many may bring benefits. I assert, however, that I do not know, the public do not know, the Government do not know, the EC does not know and the scientists do not know what the long-term effects will be, both on human health and on the structure of agriculture across the world.

The Minister will be all too well aware of the appalling history of bovine spongiform encephalopathy. In the early 1980s, the Government stated as fact that there was no danger in reducing the temperature of processing animal food. The warnings from my hon. Friends the Members for South Shields (Dr. Clark), for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) and for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang)—that are all recorded in *Hansard*—went unheeded. The Government consistently said that they were following the science of such matters, but scientific opinion has changed, and occasionally has been proved wrong, resulting in the current tragic debacle.

We might well find ourselves in the same position in respect of genetically modified foods. It behoves MAFF, the Department of the Environment, the Government and the European Union to approach the matter with the utmost—even excessive—caution.

Early-day motion 337, tabled by the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis), deserves support and the Government's attention. It rightly says:

"the food industry should not be allowed to use the general public as guinea-pigs".

In 1993, the Polkinghorne report, while claiming that copy genes of animal and human origin did not merit identification, stated:

"The first and most important requirement is for a system of labelling which permits informed choice".

I hope that the Government take that as a baseline position, and pursue the matter hard in Europe in the few months or weeks that remain before the final version of the EU regulations on novel foods.

The then Minister, now the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, accepted Polkinghorne's proposal on labelling as forming the basis of the Government's submission to the novel foods regulations, with the caveat that the rules would not apply if the inserted copy gene had been destroyed by processing. Inevitably, food producers will claim precisely that, just as we were told with certainty that lower incineration levels destroyed the BSE prion.

It appears that the novel food regulations will cover products from crops with altered agricultural characteristics, genetically modified foods that raise safety concerns—such as allergens from genes that have a source in brazil nuts, for example—and genetically modified foods that raise ethical concerns, such as those foods eaten by vegetarians which may contain animal genes, such as most vegetarian cheese. It is worth pointing out that only the Co-op labels vegetarian cheese properly.

Those criteria will raise endless debates about what the regulations cover and who makes the decision in that respect. Food manufacturers are anxious to evaluate new products against the novel foods regulations. It is quite possible that new genetically engineered food could be placed on the market without any independent safety evaluation.

In some quarters, particularly Compassion in World Farming documents, it is estimated that only about 5 to 10 per cent. of genetically modified processed foods will fall within the regulations. That means that up to 95 per cent. of genetically modified processed foods will not be appropriately labelled. I hope the Department of the Environment and MAFF will recognise and address that appalling possibility.

The growth in the introduction of genetically modified food has caused considerable public anxiety, and I have a large postbag on the matter. I received a letter from a Hindu mission in north London, declaring that its ethic is to adhere to a pure, unadulterated vegetarian diet. It expressed alarm that customers have no control over the methods used in genetic engineering. I also received a letter from a Christian group in my constituency, the Order of the Cross, asserting precisely the same thing about its members.

I have had about 100 letters from individuals making such comments, but perhaps more unexpectedly, I

[Mr. Colin Pickthall]

received one from Sainsbury's, which said that its policy is that all genetically modified foods should be labelled, but that

"all UK food retailers will be selling foods containing GM soya and maize and will be unable to label their products. Growers and food processors say they cannot currently segregate genetically modified commodity crops throughout the supply chain. This is because many growers are using both varieties and are not separating the crops at harvest time. Sainsbury's are able to label the GM tomato puree only because the company worked in partnership with the grower and planned FOR segregation and for appropriate labelling. Sainsbury's would greatly prefer to be able to identify those products containing ingredients derived from genetically modified commodity crops, such as the new varieties of soya and maize and to label them."

Sainsbury's and Safeway have both informed me that they clearly label genetically modified tomato puree—Sainsbury's strikingly so. They cannot label foods containing genetically modified soya—more than 60 products—because they do not know which they are. Sainsbury's has produced an excellent leaflet for customers explaining its dilemma about soya and maize, but the matter should not be left to such voluntary action. Many other supermarket chains and other retailers do not take action.

I have to hand a letter from the British Society of Plant Breeders Ltd., which says:

"The BSPB supports the provision of full information relating to genetically modified foodstuffs",

and adds that it is seeking to set up a cross-industry code of practice with the National Farmers Union and many other producer interests. Clearly, those are straws in the wind, showing that consumers, retailers and at least some United Kingdom manufacturers are extremely alarmed at the growing uncertainty about what is in their food. I believe that they are right to be so alarmed.

Recent concerns have centred, as I said, on soya and maize. Maize is being genetically engineered in the United States to protect the crop from corn borer. In the UK, it is used in starches and glucose syrups, which are in turn used in baking, brewing, margarine and similar products.

At present, the genetically modified maize accounts for only 1 per cent. of the UK's need, but since the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes has given it the nod, its prevalence will increase. Consumers will have no idea either of the nature of the genetic modification, since no labelling is involved, or which products they buy contain the GM maize. There is still some time for the Minister to take another, and a critical look, at that product before it becomes endemic in our diet.

A new genetically engineered soya bean has been developed by Monsanto in the United States. It has been developed to resist a herbicide that is also made by Monsanto. That new, genetically manipulated bean will shortly be a key ingredient in hundreds of foodstuffs consumed by British citizens, because it is so widely dispersed as an ingredient—Monsanto says that 60 per cent. of all foodstuffs will contain it—that it is claimed by, among others, the Food and Drink Federation that it will be impractical to label every product containing it. That is not good enough.

The Americans claim that it is impossible to segregate ordinary soya from genetically modified soya, although Monsanto successfully segregates for the purpose of providing a seed stock. Segregation would on the one hand make labelling possible and on the other enable UK food manufacturers and retailers to choose non-genetically modified soya—thus being responsive to their customers' concerns. Incidentally, Monsanto was also responsible for the development of bovine somatotrophin. When some US dairy producers took fright at the genetic modification involved and advertised BST-free products, Monsanto took out lawsuits to stop them so doing.

Monsanto claims in its letter to me that there is no difference between ordinary soya beans and what it calls round-up soya beans, and that they therefore should not be segregated. I maintain that members of the public who notice what is going on simply do not believe that, and will increasingly demand to know what is in the food they eat—round-up or otherwise.

I do not have time to go into the dangers of genetic modification producing new allergens in foods, the use of genes as markers that might create resistance to antibiotics, the effect on agriculture of concentrating production in the United States, or the possible creation of herbicide-resistant weeds. The potential medium and long-term effects of self-reproducing genetically modified organisms are not well understood.

When we consider that they will form part of baby food and almost everything our children consume, it is no wonder that some of us fear that we may be producing genetically modified people. Why not? We are already producing genetically modified animals, including cows that yield double the milk and have half the life span.

I conclude with three points for the Minister to consider. First, I understand that labelling is difficult in some cases, but consumers have the absolute right to know what goes into their food, however problematic the labelling process might be. Secondly, the Government and the EU should resist the power of giant food companies in the United States, which are effectively dictating what we must eat, without giving any convincing estimates of the long-term effects.

Thirdly, at the least, it should not be against Government policy to dig in our heels on the issue in Europe, and we should ensure that the novel food regulations, which will be produced early in 1997, protect European citizens from the possible effects on human health and on the structure of agriculture, about which we have not yet been reassured by scientists, and for which, as early-day motion 337 says, we may be acting as guinea pigs.

2.51 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): I welcome the opportunity afforded by this debate, requested by the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), to be able to report the important progress that the Government have been able to make over the past few years on a subject that is, to judge from the hon. Gentleman's speech, wide-reaching and timely. If I do not reach the end of my speech, I will

ensure that my office copies the full speech to him. He raised many important issues, all of which I would to like to cover, and I will certainly bring him up to date on the latest position on genetically modified maize, which is a current matter for concern.

The use of genetic modification in food production will increase in importance in coming years, so it is vital that robust procedures are in place to safeguard the consumer. The hon. Gentleman gave an indication that he understands some of the difficulties in doing that, but I do not argue with the principle of safeguards for the consumer, and I believe that the UK leads the world in that regard.

In regulating developments in biotechnology, the UK has always maintained a precautionary approach. That is especially true of the operation of the various independent expert committees that offer advice to the Government.

A question that is often asked is whether regulatory controls on biotechnology are adequate. The UK was one of the first countries in the world to introduce controls on modern biotechnology, as long ago as 1978. They were not introduced in response to any identified health or environmental problems, but rather followed a precautionary approach, because of the recognised lack of familiarity with the behaviour of genetically modified organisms at that time and the need to provide for safety.

It is well known that the rate of growth in the world population is set to outstrip the world's capacity to feed itself using existing food production techniques. That problem will become most acute in areas such as sub-Saharan Africa, where drought and storage losses already result in food shortages. The issue was discussed extensively at the United Nations world food summit held in Rome last month.

The UN is confident that, through the use of modern biotechnology, it will be possible to increase crop yields dramatically, but that is only one of the advantages that modern biotechnology can bring. The technology also has the potential to offer many benefits to UK consumers, including improved nutritional qualities, flavour, choice of foods and lower prices.

In the UK, the safety of all genetically modified foods is rigorously assessed by the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes—ACNFP—which is an independent body of experts chaired by Professor Derek Burke, former vice-chancellor of the university of East Anglia.

The ACNFP bases its safety assessment on the concept of substantial equivalence. That concept, which has been endorsed by the World Health Organisation, involves a comparison of a genetically modified food with its conventional equivalent, considering carefully any differences, both intentional and unintentional.

In doing that, the committee conducts a thorough examination of the results of a wide range of analytical and toxicological tests. I had the pleasure of sitting in on one of the committee's meetings only last week. I assure the House that the high respect with which the committee is held worldwide is fully justified by the critical and thorough approach that it brings to its work and the dedication with which it scrutinises even the smallest details of applications. It places considerable emphasis on the need to proceed with caution. If it has the slightest doubt about a food, it will not approve it.

The ACNFP has consulted widely on the structured procedure that it follows in assessing the safety of GM foods. That approach ensures that all information that is considered relevant to a specific application is provided by the applicant. The procedures being developed by the European Community Scientific Committee for Food are based closely on that tried-and-tested method of safety assessment.

The ACNFP takes great pride in operating a policy of openness and in publishing reports on each novel food that it approves. It has found—I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome this—the presence of a consumer representative on the committee to be particularly helpful in ensuring that issues of public concern are taken into account during its deliberations.

The ACNFP works closely with other advisory committees, including the Committee on the Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, the Food Advisory Committee and the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment. That close collaboration enables the ACNFP to tap into a wide range of expertise in reaching a final decision on the safety of a specific novel food. Its procedures are also underpinned by an £800,000 research programme, which is funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, which ensures that the science that the committee applies is kept fully up to date.

The hon. Gentleman specifically raised the labelling of genetically modified foods. The existing EC legislation on the release of GMOs, and the UK regulations that implement it, already contain labelling requirements where they are related to safety concerns. The UK has been pressing, however, for the labelling provisions for GM foods to go wider than that.

In recent years, the independent Food Advisory Committee, which advises the Government on food labelling issues, has considered the labelling of GM foods in great detail. It first issued labelling guidelines in 1993. Those took account of two public consultation exercises, as well as the views of the committee mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, which was set up in 1992 under the chairmanship of the Rev. Mr. Polkinghorne to consider the ethics of genetic modification and food use.

As a result, the guidelines recommended that a genetically modified food should be labelled if it contained a copy of an ethically sensitive gene—that is, a copy of a gene from an animal of religious significance, a human gene or an animal gene introduced into a plant. In recent months, the extent to which it is possible to introduce statutory labelling provisions for novel foods has been the subject of much debate in Europe. The UK has been pressing for the proposed EU regulation on novel foods and novel food ingredients to be adopted as a matter of urgency.

A common position, which had the full support of the UK, was agreed by member states in October last year. To demonstrate the UK's commitment to the regulation,

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

the Food Advisory Committee immediately updated its guidance on labelling to reflect the common position of the novel food regulation.

Although recognising the concerns expressed by a some consumers, the FAC acknowledges that there are practical limitations to food labelling. The hon. Gentleman touched on this, particularly in relation to soya. Any compulsory labelling requirements for novel foods must be enforceable, which in turn depends on whether the novel food can be distinguished from a conventional food. In the case of food ingredients such as highly processed soya derivatives, such distinction is not scientifically possible.

The FAC recognises that many consumers are unfamiliar with genetically modified foods, and has stressed that, particularly when labelling is not a condition of approval, manufacturers and retailers should be encouraged to provide additional information in response to public interest. That includes additional labelling information where appropriate. The hon. Member mentioned Sainsbury, which—along with others—has responded to this.

I can inform the House that a final text of the regulation was agreed in Brussels at the end of last month. The text represents a good deal for the UK. It contains extensive labelling provisions which, most importantly from the consumer's point of view, are enforceable. Although the text has been agreed by the conciliation committee, the proposal has yet to be adopted by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. I very much hope that both sides will progress this without delay.

Agreement of the regulation will lead to special labelling when a novel food is judged, on the basis of scientific assessment, not to be equivalent to an existing food. Food would also be labelled if there are any special ethical concerns, or if it contains a genetically modified organism.

The Food Advisory Committee met yesterday and agreed that it would use the final text of the draft EU novel foods regulation as the basis for its future discussions on the labelling of novel foods. The FAC also discussed a paper from consumer organisations on the case for labelling foods containing ingredients made from genetically modified soya beans, a matter to which the hon. Member for West Lancashire referred, for reasons I understand.

After careful consideration, the FAC reaffirmed its previous advice that compulsory labelling of genetically modified soya products should not be a condition of approval, since such products were indistinguishable from conventional products. I have heard what the hon. Member for West Lancashire said today, and we shall pay careful attention to his views. However, the FAC also reiterated its conclusion from an earlier meeting that the provision of voluntary information, including labelling where practicable, should be used to supplement any labelling recommendations made by the committee.

Finally, the Committee fully accepted the importance of accurate information for consumers. It noted and supported industry efforts in pursuing segregation of genetically modified crops, although there are some complexities—of which the hon. Member for West Lancashire will be aware—in achieving segregation throughout the food chain. Both he and I are conscious of the fact that, if segregation is to take place, it must do so at an early starting point in the food process.

I wish to bring the hon. Member for West Lancashire up to date on the question of genetically modified maize—a matter to which he referred and which the Government have considered.

In accordance with the comitology procedures of directive 90/220, a decision on issuing a marketing consent for the importation of genetically modified maize—particularly that coming in from the US—rests with the Commission. Before reaching a decision on whether to allow marketing consent, the Commission has requested the advice of three of its scientific committees. The scientific committee for pesticides has finalised its advice and concluded that it has no concern that would prevent a marketing consent from being issued.

The scientific committee for food and the scientific committee for animal nutrition are meeting today to finalise their opinion on genetically modified maize. We believe—although I do not wish to pre-empt their conclusion—that they will recommend that a marketing consent be issued. The advice from all three committees will be forwarded to the Commission tonight. On Wednesday 18 December, the Commission is expected to reach a decision on marketing consent.

The Department of the Environment is co-ordinating a UK response to the Commission decision, and a Cabinet Office meeting has been arranged for 3.30 this afternoon to discuss the handling of the outcome of the decision. This is a matter of concern, on which I have received a great deal of correspondence.

I can assure the hon. Member for West Lancashire that—pending the outcome of the decision—unprocessed genetically modified maize is, to the best of our knowledge, not being distributed in the UK or the rest of the EU. If it has been imported, it would be illegal for it to be distributed, and obviously Customs and Excise is aware of this fact. Given his interest in bringing this subject to the Floor of the House, I will make it the business of my office to ensure that he is contacted directly as soon as we have further information.

The hon. Gentleman has rightly identified that there are concerns about this science. On the other hand, I would not want the House to believe that it does not have potential benefits. It is a question of getting the balance right between dealing with the concerns of the House and the wider public, particularly consumers, and ensuring that we do not dismiss a science that has potentially a lot to offer, not just in this country but, as I explained, around the world.

To that end, we have tried at the Ministry of Agriculture to ensure that the general public have an understanding of the basics of the science. We have introduced literature in our "Food Sense" series, for example, to ensure that people understand it. It is not something that we are gung-ho about. As I identified, we think that a cautious approach is needed.

We have the advice of independent scientific committees, in which I have a great deal of faith,

particularly the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes, which I have visited. I have heard about its case-by-case method of dealing with the matter.

I will keep the hon. Gentleman informed of the outcome of the more topical issues that are in front of the United Kingdom Government and the European Union at the moment.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 16 December 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

St. Bartholomew's Hospital

1. **Dr. Goodson–Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations she has had with the Department of Health over the future of the buildings of St. Bartholomew's hospital. [7593]

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): None, as yet; the St. Bartholomew's hospital site is still operational, and it is not likely to close for at least another five years. Obviously, my Department will be involved at the appropriate time in discussions over the future of that important historic site.

Dr. Goodson–Wickes: My hon. Friend will recognise the grave disquiet that is still felt by many at the closure of St. Bartholomew's hospital, after almost nine centuries of distinguished use for medical purposes. Will he assure the House that he will liaise extremely closely with the Royal Hospital of St. Bartholomew Charitable Foundation, which is now linked with the special trustees and the Corporation of London, to ensure that there is an appropriate future user of that magnificent site, and that an act of medical vandalism is not followed by an act of architectural vandalism?

Mr. Sproat: I can tell my hon. Friend that a group has been set up, under Sir Ronald Grierson, to examine suitable possible uses for the site. Sir Ronald has said that, whatever use is made of the site, it will continue to have a medical association and will be used for a purpose that is suitable to its history. I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks.

Mr. Mackinlay: As a Conservative Minister, does the hon. Gentleman not get sick and tired of his colleagues criticising decisions taken by the likes of himself and the Secretary of State for National Heritage when those decisions do not suit their colleagues' purposes—as if their colleagues have no responsibility in those matters? Is it not a matter of Conservative policy that Bart's is to close, and is it not true that the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson–Wickes) is guilty by association? He is to blame, as are the Minister and the right hon. Lady.

Mr. Sproat: The medical future of St. Bartholomew's is a matter for the Department of Health. However, the importance of that historical site is partially a matter for my Department, and I shall ensure that my Department fulfils entirely its obligations.

British Film Industry

2. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the impact of the national lottery on the British film industry [7594]

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): The national lottery has had a good impact on the British film industry, which is currently enjoying an excellent year. Already, more than £60 million has been awarded to 150 projects, which includes more than £35 million for 96 film productions. That is a tremendous achievement in so short a time, and it has been welcomed by the film industry.

Mr. Jessel: As Britain has brilliant film producers, actors, actresses and other creative talent, and as the revival of the British film industry was already well under way even before the additional £60 million, to which my right hon. Friend has already referred, from the Arts Council—from lottery funds, so building on our strengths—will she join me in warmly welcoming the film industry's tremendous achievements? It is a terrific national asset.

Mrs. Bottomley: I warmly congratulate the film industry, which has had a wonderful centenary year. Last week's exhibition by the British Film Institute—"Still Moving After 100 Years"—which was very much co-ordinated by my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant), set a magnificent example. This year, more than 100 films have gone into production; the ITV network and Channel 4 have each announced more than £100 million for film; cinema admissions have exceeded £100 million; and the film festival exceeded 100,000 admissions. In the past 25 years, more than 100 Oscars have been awarded to British talent. Moreover, of the many major films made in Britain in the past year, one of them was "101 Dalmatians".

Dr. John Cunningham: Funds provided to the British film industry from the national lottery are of course welcome. However, the right hon. Lady has withdrawn from the Eurimages scheme, and apparently she intends not to join in the European guarantee fund—thereby excluding our film-makers and film industry from access to European funds. In her response to the Middleton committee, she said that she would establish a film finance forum. Will she guarantee the House that that forum will provide the British film industry with greater access to funding, and thereby make up for the shortfall that she has imposed on it by withdrawing from those schemes and by blocking our entry to others? What is her answer?

Mrs. Bottomley: The difference between the Labour party and us is that we take a strategic view on supporting the projects that will deliver a practical return. This year, we took the view that the right thing to do was to put an extra £250,000 into the National Film and Television School and to put extra money into the British Film Commission and the British Film Institute. We believe

that that is the way forward. We have been able to accept eight of the 11 recommendations of the Middleton report. On that basis, the British film industry will go from strength to strength.

National Lottery

3. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received in respect of the impact of the national lottery on (a) the Football Trust and (b) the bingo industry; and if she will make a statement. [7595]

Mr. Sproat: The Department has received more than 80 letters in respect of Football Trust funding from Members of Parliament and football clubs, in addition to representations from the trust itself. The Department has also received representations about the impact of the national lottery on the bingo industry, which have been passed to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, who has responsibility for bingo.

Mr. Wareing: In view of the impact of the national lottery on the Football Trust, will the Government consider allowing the smaller clubs in the Football League to implement the Taylor proposals on an extended timetable—say, to 2002 or 2003? How can the Secretary of State claim to be the champion of the bingo industry when she refuses it a level playing field with the national lottery? A level playing field would at least enable the bingo industry to advertise its own lottery.

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right to say that the national lottery has had a serious effect on the finances of the Football Trust. However, we think that the trust's estimate of a shortfall of some £33 million is perhaps too high. The Football Licensing Authority has recently considered the figures and agrees that the estimate is perhaps a little too high. I hope that the trust and the FLA can work things out together. At the moment, we are certainly not thinking of increasing the time scale within which the Taylor proposals have to be implemented—we want to stick to August 1999.

As for bingo, that is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Mans: My hon. Friend will know how important the Football Trust and the bingo industry are for the north-west of Britain, and Lancashire in particular. Will he therefore liaise with the Home Secretary and ensure that, if necessary, rules are introduced to make certain that the bingo industry can, as the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) said, compete with the national lottery on a national field? Otherwise, we are likely to see the industry decline considerably in the years ahead—something that none of us wants.

Mr. Sproat: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks because my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is currently considering, in the context of his review of the entire gambling industry, what further deregulation and liberalisation might help the bingo industry.

Mr. Pendry: Is the Minister aware that the Football Trust has today written to all clubs in the Football League and the Scottish League to say that the national lottery has so reduced its income that it has had to impose, with immediate effect, a moratorium on grants for the implementation of the Taylor report? In view of the dramatic decline in the trust's income, there will be an immediate halt on essential safety work at lower league clubs such as Blackpool, Portsmouth, Brighton, Luton, Exeter, East Fife, Falkirk and many more. In the light of the Secretary of State's helpful comments in the Football Trust's annual report 1995-96, highlighting the important work that lies ahead in helping smaller clubs to improve their spectator facilities by the 1999 season, will the Minister join her in meeting the trust in an attempt to remedy that worrying situation?

Mr. Sproat: As I said to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), it is certainly true that the national lottery has had a serious impact on the Football Trust. However, as he will know, the Treasury has in effect forgone some 16 per cent. of pools duty—10 per cent. in two tranches of 5 per cent. is to help the pools industry and 6 per cent. is to go direct to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts and the Football Trust. In addition, the Premiership has signed a deal for £743 million for television rights for four years from 1997, while the Football League is in the first year of a five-year £125 million television deal. That should all be taken into account, but I should be happy to meet the Football Trust to try to find a better solution.

4. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many individual prizes have been won since the national lottery was established. [7596]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: As at 9 December, more than 133 million prizes had been won on the on-line game.

Mr. Brown: That is an excellent figure, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the public are still concerned that some of the prizes are exceptionally large, particularly in roll-over weeks? Does she agree that there is still a case for Camelot to examine whether the public would prefer 10 people to win £1 million in a weekend rather than £10 million being won by one person, as sometimes happens?

Mrs. Bottomley: The lottery remains under review, although there is no evidence so far that winning one of the large prizes has any adverse effect. Like others, I have studied Hunter Davies's book, "Living on the Lottery". On the whole, it told a favourable tale of what it is like to win a substantial prize. The allocation of prizes is designed to maximise the return to the good causes. In roll-over weeks, far more people play the national lottery. That means that even more good causes are supported. Seven good causes in my hon. Friend's constituency have already been assisted and I am sure that he will want to know that the national total is 10,394 awards, with £2.78 billion raised for good causes. There has not been a more effective lottery anywhere in the world.

Mr. Cunliffe: Is the Minister aware that some prizes have been claimed by under-age purchasers? Has she noticed the early-day motion signed by several hon. Members expressing concern about the ease with which

under-age people can purchase tickets, especially scratchcards? Would it not be better to have further controls under the licensed betting office system with an age threshold of 18? That would obviously curtail many purchases by under-age children.

Mrs. Bottomley: I am entirely at one with the hon. Gentleman in condemning under-age play. I welcome the recent announcements by the Office of the National Lottery and Camelot about the further action that they intend to take. One of the most effective sanctions is the removal of the on-line game. Some 35,000 retail outlets currently benefit from being part of the national lottery, providing them with an average of £8,000 a year. The greatest sanction is the removal of that income. The hon. Gentleman is right to raise his concerns. We shall continue to be vigilant in ensuring that under-age children do not play.

5. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many proposals from Kent have received funding in the various categories from the national lottery. [7597]

Mr. Sproat: A total of 171 lottery awards have been made in Kent, to a total value of more than £15 million. Eleven awards each have been made to the arts and the heritage, 97 to charities and voluntary organisations and 52 to sports projects.

Mr. Rowe: My hon. Friend will be glad to know that we in Kent are grateful for that, but we are still waiting for a major award. The county town is striving to create a new park along the river Medway, to give the town the ambience that it deserves. Can he give us any encouragement that the project—now being put forward for the second time of asking—has a chance of receiving support?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend may be glad to know that, of the 58 county and unitary authorities, Kent comes 22nd in the list for the total amount received and eighth in the list for the number of projects for which awards have been made. I know from our previous conversations that my hon. Friend is very keen on the Maidstone river park project. It is up to the commission to decide whether to give it money, but it is a splendid project and I am sure that it will get a fair review.

Sporting Ambassadors Initiative

6. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the sporting ambassadors initiative. [7598]

Mr. Sproat: Sir Colin Cowdrey has been appointed to chair a new committee to look at ways of encouraging more sporting ambassadors to visit schools. The committee, which has Roger Black, Steven Redgrave and Jo Durie among its members, met for the first time last week. It is the intention that the scheme will be up and running in schools before the end of the current academic year.

Mr. Arnold: Is that not wonderful news for sportsmen and sportswomen up and down the country? The scheme will enhance Britain's performance in athletics and in sport generally around the world. Will not Britain's performance be further enhanced by the British Academy of Sport, at a cost of £100 million? We in north-west Kent are particularly delighted to see that the bid for the British Academy of Sport, from north-west Kent, Kent Thames-side, has been shortlisted by my hon. Friend. We look forward to it becoming a success because, if it is, the facilities in north-west Kent will very much enhance the prospect of London being the site for the 2004 Olympics.

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend is right. The sporting ambassadors scheme will be a tremendous boost for boys and girls at school because their heroines and heroes will come to encourage, enthuse and inspire them in sport. Getting sport back at the heart of school life is part of our overarching strategy for sport, which spreads from schools right up to the eight scholarships for elite athletes and the British Academy of Sport, to which my hon. Friend referred. I know that the Kent application, which I have seen—I met a delegation earlier this year before all the bids came in—is extremely good. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the tremendous support that he continues to give to that bid for the British Academy of Sport.

Mr. Maxton: What is the point of sending ambassadors of sport into schools to encourage sport when there have been cuts in local government expenditure? The city of Glasgow is having to reduce its ability to rent out sporting facilities to clubs and it is reducing the number of sporting facilities in schools in Glasgow. What is the point of encouraging people to take part in sport when sporting facilities are being cut in that way?

Mr. Sproat: I say two things to the hon. Gentleman. First, he should ask the Labour local education authority why facilities in schools in Glasgow are being reduced. Secondly, I have never pretended to the House that I was satisfied with sport in schools at the moment, whether in Scotland or in England. A sporting ambassadors scheme that gets stars of sport into schools must lead to a big increase in activity. It will be up and running this year and I believe that every person who is keen on sport will support the idea.

Voluntary Sector

7. **Mr. Richards:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on developments in the voluntary sector since 1979. [7599]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Since 1979, the Government have consistently developed policies to encourage a healthy and effective voluntary sector, to encourage volunteering and to promote effective relations between voluntary organisations and Government Departments. The Government are committed to continuing those policies in the future.

Mr. Richards: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the vast bulk of lottery awards goes to charities and voluntary bodies? Will she join me in congratulating the Ethiniog Cheshire home in Colwyn bay on its successful bid for almost £200,000 to build a hydrotherapy pool, a gymnasium and other facilities for the rehabilitation of

brain damage victims? It is a much-needed development and I very much hope that the health authority will help to take the scheme forward with further funding for a six-bed unit.

Mrs. Bottomley: I warmly congratulate the Cheshire home; the award will be an excellent Christmas present. Tomorrow, the caring charities announce their final tranche before Christmas of projects for health disability and care. So far, they have awarded £360 million to 5,400 schemes throughout the country. I am sure that all of them will achieve the amount of good in their local community that the Cheshire home has in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Mr. Flynn: The House will congratulate that home on its splendid work, which is carried out by many people who voluntarily sacrifice their time. Is it not true, however, that, despite the growing number of people who need a helping hand or an attentive ear, many of the services that existed in the 1970s have disappeared because funding to public services has shrunk every year? Sadly, many of those services have to be provided by the voluntary sector, which has resulted in an uncertainty of provision by amateurs, who cannot be relied on to maintain a full professional service.

Mrs. Bottomley: I regret the hon. Gentleman's rather cynical comments. As the Government have created more wealth, we have been able to invest much more in our public services than the Labour party ever did. The successful and flourishing economy enabled us to put an extra £1.6 billion into the national health service this year. In addition, the extra money from the lottery means that even more help can be provided to even more people. In particular, I celebrate the activities of those involved in volunteering, which is part of a civilised and compassionate society. I welcome the recent announcement by the Charity Board endorsing volunteering schemes that encourage the involvement of young people.

Sir Alan Haselhurst: Will my right hon. Friend confirm her support for the Community Development Foundation, which has the capacity to cover hundreds of thousands of informal volunteers? Will she confirm that it will continue to have high priority in her Department's expenditure plans?

Mrs. Bottomley: I strongly support my hon. Friend in his work as chairman of the Community Development Foundation, which has made an important impact and has encouraged the establishment of smaller voluntary groups. I am announcing the establishment of the volunteering partnership forum for England—a group of experts who will advise me on volunteering policy and practice. I shall chair the forum jointly with Mr. Nicholas Ward. A particular focus of the "make a difference" initiative was to encourage young people to become involved in their communities in a positive way. The first target of the volunteering partnership forum for England will be to carry forward the pledge that every young person between 15 and 25 who so wishes will have an opportunity to volunteer. Those involved in the Community Development Foundation will be members of the volunteering partnership forum for England.

Arts Promotion

8. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much her Department spent on publicity for arts promotion in (a) 1995–96, (b) 1994–95 and (c) 1993–94 [7600]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Art galleries, theatres and other arts bodies are responsible for their own promotional activities. My Department has no specific budget for arts promotion. Much of our work is concerned with developing policies to improve access to the arts for everybody—young and old.

Mr. Cunningham: Given that answer, can the Minister explain why we get at least three publicity publications a week from her Department? Will she tell us how much they cost?

Mrs. Bottomley: I can certainly make available the Department's information budget. However, the number of documents produced by my Department is nothing like as significant as the hon. Gentleman implies. This year, we set out a policy, "Setting the Scene" to encourage the involvement of young people in the arts. We take the view that, although buildings are important, it is even more important to involve the next generation in artistic activities. Similarly, we wish more people to know how to claim lottery awards and we have encouraged the Arts Council to promote widely information about how to access lottery funds to ensure the widest possible spread. I would be happy to provide the hon. Gentleman with any further information.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend accept that most people think that the arts have done rather well as a result of the national lottery, the generosity of her Department and private sponsorship and that most of us share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) that enough is enough?

Mrs. Bottomley: I take my hon. Friend's comments on board. The arts have never had so much opportunity. An extra £695 million has been provided in the past 18 months. In addition, it has been possible to maintain funding for the arts this year and provide more than £3 million more than had been anticipated. I was delighted to see the comments of the distinguished Richard Eyre who said,

"I am happy to eat humble pie",

when he realised precisely how much the Government were putting into the arts as well as the substantial contributions from the national lottery.

Important Heritage Sites

9. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps she proposes to take to improve public access to, the presentation of, and the information provided at, important heritage sites. [7601]

Mr. Sproat: The main organisations concerned with the presentation of important heritage sites are English Heritage, the Historic Royal Palaces agency, and the

National Trust. Those bodies have all made great improvements in recent years in the presentation of their properties to the public.

Mr. Shaw: I assure my hon. Friend that Dover castle is looking in first-class shape these days. It has defended the nation and helped to keep out invaders from Europe for some 900 years. It is a splendid example of the nation's heritage. There have been plans and proposals for converting the officers' mess in Dover castle to improve the presentation and opportunities for visitors. Are those plans progressing?

Mr. Sproat: I can tell my hon. Friend about the splendid aspect of Dover castle as a whole, which English Heritage has various proposals to enhance even further over the coming years at considerable expense—millions of pounds. My hon. Friend will know that, in 1981, the floors of the old officers' mess in Dover castle were in such rotten condition that the Department of the Environment gutted the building. English Heritage is now investigating whether a viable scheme to use the old officers' mess as a hotel might be forthcoming, and would readily welcome such a scheme.

Mr. Tony Banks: Many Labour Members would like to see the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) strung up by his fleshy parts in the dungeon of the castle.

One of the areas in which there is very poor signing of heritage sites is here in the capital city. Has the Minister read the report that came out today from the British Road Federation, on signposting and general information in London? The signposting in London is appalling. It is not surprising that loads of Londoners get lost; God knows how the tourists manage. Can the Minister do something about that? Will he speak to the Department of Transport and get something done for London?

Mr. Sproat: I have not read the report to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but as he has drawn it to my attention, I shall certainly look at it. I do not accept that the signing is as bad as he says. More than 50 per cent. of all tourists to this country come to London, and they continue to come. Last year, a record number of tourists came here, so matters cannot be as bad as the hon. Gentleman describes. However, everything can be improved. I shall look at the report and see what improvements I can recommend.

Sir Irvine Patnick: One of the buildings that could be joining the illustrious list is Park Hill flats in Sheffield, which were built in the 1950s. As residents say, how can such a concrete mass—I repeat, concrete mass—ever be included in such a list? I agree with them. It is a monstrosity, and I am surprised that it has been listed or even recommended for listing as a heritage site or site of historic value.

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend speaks for many when he expresses surprise that that block was listed. It is true—we may come to this in another question—that listed buildings are listed not just because of their beauty, but because of their alleged architectural innovation. No doubt, that is one of the reasons why it was suggested that that block should be listed.

National Lottery Awards

10. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will introduce proposals to ensure a more equitable distribution of lottery awards by the size of population in each geographic area; and if she will make a statement. [7602]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have instructed the lottery distributors to be aware of the need to ensure a fair and even spread of awards throughout the United Kingdom. Although my directions to the distributing bodies prevent them from soliciting particular applications, they may, where necessary, target their publicity efforts towards certain areas to encourage the submission of the right quality and quantity of applications.

Mr. Barnes: When we speak of lottery awards, we are talking about big spondulicks: £40 for every man, woman and child in the country has been paid out so far in lottery awards, so reasonable distribution of those awards is important. Awards are often more readily accessible under the National Lottery Charities Board provision, yet only one seventh of the money goes to it. Should not money be moved from projects such as the millennium fund to the board, so that local voluntary organisations can get access to it?

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman will find that, as the different series of awards are announced, all communities, and all parts of the country, will benefit. I have been concerned about the lack of applications from his area, and have visited it to try to encourage more applications to be submitted. In the past quarter, the biggest increase in awards has been in the west midlands, so I shall bear the hon. Gentleman's thoughts in mind. I do not believe that it is sensible to tinker with the different lottery award streams, and I hope that those involved in arts and sport will realise that the Labour party is threatening to reduce—for the first time ever—the amount for such causes.

The hon. Gentleman may be aware that, apart from the large projects, 370 village halls and 250 millennium greens are involved, and many coastal restorations and canal schemes are going ahead. The Millennium Commission announced today another £40 million for canal restoration, regeneration and a temple in the west midlands.

Mr. Skinner: East midlands, not west.

Dr. Spink: Does my right hon. Friend agree that distribution of national lottery awards is important because it determines the distribution of the 100,000 jobs that such awards are sustaining around the country? Is she aware that quite a number of jobs are being sustained in my constituency where, for example, the Castle Point volunteer bureau recently received £28,000 from the national lottery, which was very well received?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is right. He will recall the words of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), who first described the lottery as a threat to jobs and

"the unacceptable face of nationalisation."—[*Official Report*, 25 January 1993; Vol. 217, c. 731.]

The Henley Centre predicted that 110,000 new jobs would be created over five years as a result of the national lottery. Investment in Doncaster, Portsmouth harbour, Newcastle and Bristol, and major schemes throughout the country are bringing new opportunities, jobs and prosperity to all parts of the United Kingdom.

Dr. John Cunningham: On the equitable distribution of lottery and millennium funds, does the right hon. Lady agree that, although we want a successful exhibition at Greenwich, it should not take place at any price or be allowed to pre-empt more and more Millennium Commission funds, which should legitimately go to other parts of the United Kingdom? If she really wants all-party support for future decisions about that exhibition, will she ensure that deliberations and decision-taking are inclusive rather than exclusive, as they have been until very recently? Will she also finally end the exclusion of Greenwich borough council from the discussions? Is not it absurd to be planning a project in the borough, which will perhaps cost £1 billion, and not include the borough's leadership in consideration of it?

Mrs. Bottomley: The millennium exhibition is an extremely exciting prospect for Britain; it is Britain's shopfront as we go into a new century. It is a complex project, and the right hon. Gentleman is aware of some of the detailed figures involved. I hope that it will be possible to make more announcements in the near future. As he knows, the Millennium Commission and, indeed, the Government are quite as concerned as he is not to sign a blank cheque, but to ensure that there is good value for grant. The project provides a real opportunity for Britain to celebrate the new millennium.

Alongside the project is the festival involving the nation as a whole, £200 million of millennium awards and the great range of projects throughout the country, some of which I have just mentioned, such as those involving village halls, village greens, woodlands and canal restoration. I hope that everyone will be encourage by the canal restoration in Huddersfield, the Ballymena town park, the Yorkshire dales project, the Croydon lighting scheme, the Norfolk broads announcement, and the 205th scout group to receive support—this time in Manningtree, Essex.

St. Pancras Station

11. **Mr. Alan Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received on the future of St. Pancras station and St. Pancras chambers; and if she will make a statement. [7603]

Mr. Sproat: Discussions on the future of those buildings have taken place between English Heritage, the Department of Transport and London and Continental Railways. Both my Department and the Department of the Environment have kept in close touch with progress, and we have of course been aware of English Heritage's views. We have also received representations from the Victorian Society and from one member of the public.

Mr. Howarth: Why have the Government abandoned the normal conservation controls on the grade I listed buildings of St. Pancras, which are of prime importance aesthetically and historically? Does the Minister accept that the heritage provisions of the rail link legislation amount to little more than vague statements of intent, omit to cover key areas of the work, and remove the Secretary of State's ultimate power to decide on major aspects? What is the point of having a Department of National Heritage if it will not stand up to the Department of Transport and is supine before the bulldozers of private investors?

Mr. Sproat: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. In fact, the heritage deed encompassed in the new Bill will give the right balance between the interests of aesthetics and listed buildings and the need to provide a terminal for the chunnel link. Under the heritage deed provisions, for listed buildings such as St. Pancras chambers, agreement will have to be reached between the railway authorities and the listed building authorities.

Only when railway technicalities could affect the aesthetics of the station—for instance, in extensions to platforms or roofs over those extensions—will only consultation, and not agreement, be required. Even in cases in which agreement does not have to be reached, there is provision for appeal to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and to the Secretary of State for the Environment. A proper balance has been struck to deal with the fears that the hon. Gentleman outlined.

Mr. Fisher: Does the Minister accept that, in addition to St. Pancras station, a growing number of important public buildings, including several key Government buildings in Whitehall, are either empty or becoming empty? Do the Government have any policy at all for dealing with those? Will he accept that flogging them off, or trying to get the maximum rent, as the Government tried to do with the Royal Hospital at Greenwich, is simply not the right policy, and that a much more imaginative policy is needed to put those great public buildings into public use?

Mr. Sproat: Indeed, it is not simply a question of getting the maximum amount of money—as the hon. Gentleman said. He talked about the need for imagination; that need is being met. In every case in which such buildings are offered to bidders, we consider bidders whose purposes are consonant with the traditions of the building and who will maintain its listed standards.

Listed Buildings

12. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many buildings in England are listed; and if she will make a statement. [7604]

Mr. Sproat: We estimate that there are about 500,000 listed buildings in England.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I recognise that various factors are involved in any assessment of which buildings should be listed as being of architectural importance and that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick) said, because some modern buildings have been included, there must be an element of subjective judgment. I regret that no buildings designed by me have yet been listed. Does my hon. Friend accept that, now that we have half a million listed buildings in England, the

Government's policy should be centred on conserving those buildings? Does he further agree that spot listing should not be encouraged and that there should be a moratorium before there is any further review of which buildings should be listed?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend is entirely right, in that many people feel that the number of listed buildings has increased dramatically—perhaps excessively—over the past few years. The Government have encouraged English Heritage to consider certain themes—in addition to the geographical location of the buildings—such as old railways, old shops, schools and, as I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick), certain buildings displaying innovative architectural techniques that ought to be considered.

None the less, I am sure that we have not yet got entirely right the proper considerations for listing buildings. My Department recently published a Green Paper, and there have been consultations on it; we shall take fully into account my hon. Friend's valid points.

Mr. Corbyn: As the Minister is discussing listed buildings, may I draw his attention to two London buildings, Battersea power station and county hall, which require some urgent action by him? He should act to prevent Battersea power station from falling down and ensure that it is put to appropriate use given the state in which it was left by the last speculators. Will he also save county hall from the ravages of multinational hotel prospectors?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman has alluded to two extremely important buildings. I share his concern that they should not be allowed to deteriorate, and he will be glad to hear that they are not deteriorating. Representatives of English Heritage visit Battersea power station every few weeks, but I cannot recall exactly the frequency of visits paid to the old Greater London council building. They are making absolutely certain, however, that those buildings are in a decent condition.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts (Suffolk)

28. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to visit magistrates courts in Suffolk, to discuss possible court closures and amalgamations. [7623]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Gary Streeter): I am due to visit Haverhill and Mildenhall magistrates courts on Monday 28 January 1997 as part of a programme of visits to help maintain my Department's good working relationship with the individual magistrates courts committees, which are responsible for running those courts.

Mr. Spring: When my hon. Friend comes to Suffolk, he can be assured of a warm welcome, but when he meets magistrates from the Haverhill and north-west Suffolk benches he will also learn of their considerable concern about the future of those courts and their potential closure. It is my firm belief that local justice should be meted out by local magistrates in local courthouses. I must tell my hon. Friend that, should the current proposals be advanced further, I shall fight them every inch of the way both in Suffolk and in the House.

Mr. Streeter: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the way in which he has spoken out on behalf of his constituents—he is well known in this place for doing so. There is no proposal to close the courthouses that he has mentioned. I look forward greatly to my visit to Suffolk in January. I know that I will receive a warm welcome at the hands of my hon. Friend's constituents, just as he received a warm welcome from me this afternoon.

Mr. Olner: When the Minister has completed his visit to Somerset—

Hon. Members: Suffolk.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman had better get his question in order: the Minister is not going to Somerset. I hope that the hon. Gentleman has noticed that the substantive question concerns Suffolk alone.

Mr. Olner: I apologise, Madam Speaker. When the Minister has visited Suffolk, will he also visit Nuneaton magistrates court in Warwickshire because, just like the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring)—

Madam Speaker: Order. I take to heart matters of such enormous importance, but the question is about Suffolk. I must be firm about this, and I call Mr. Llwyd.

Magistrates Courts (Closure)

29. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the procedure for intervention by the Lord Chancellor's Department in the matter of a dispute about closure of a magistrates court; and if he will make a statement. [7624]

Mr. Streeter: There is no procedure for intervention as magistrates courts are not Crown property. The Lord Chancellor is involved in a dispute over a magistrates court only when an appeal is made by a contributing local authority against a proposed closure. The procedure for such appeals is set out in section 56 of the Justices of the Peace Act 1979. In the event of a such an appeal, the Lord Chancellor will call for a report from both parties and make a final decision, which is binding. In the absence of such an appeal, the Lord Chancellor has no locus in the matter.

Mr. Llwyd: I thank the Minister for that reply. He will be aware of my concern about my constituency of Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, which is one of the largest geographically in the United Kingdom. The magistrates clerk has circulated the preposterous idea of closing the last but one court, which would leave the entire constituency to be served by one magistrates court. The Minister is aware that an appeal is pending. Will he please meet a small delegation led by me as soon as possible so that that preposterous and ridiculous notion can be put to rest at last?

Mr. Streeter: If an appeal in relation to the court that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned is pending, it would be inappropriate for me to comment. I would be delighted to receive a delegation from his constituency, as I have from other hon. Members in the past few weeks. I look forward to that, and I will listen carefully to the case that he puts for the retention of the courts in his constituency. We recognise that, in rural areas in particular, the distance that people must travel to court and the cost of their journey are significant matters.

Mr. Harry Greenway: When considering the possible closure of magistrates courts, or any other function of any other court, will my hon. Friend consider the recent incident in which a convicted murderer telephoned, or received calls from, a newspaper? That caused enormous distress—

Madam Speaker: Order. What does this have to do with magistrates courts?

Mr. Greenway: I am referring to the function of a court in achieving the conviction of an individual, and the subsequent behaviour of that individual.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman did not describe his question in that way. The main question deals with magistrates courts, and so must the answer.

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend raises an important point concerning the magistrates courts in his constituency and people who have passed through them in relation to offences that they may have committed. He speaks for many people when he describes the offence that has been caused by the incident that he mentioned, and his points are well made.

Hon. Members: Was that a challenge to you, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: It certainly was a challenge, and I do not accept that the question put by the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) was correct in following the substantive question.

Mr. Boateng: In view of the widespread concern about the erosion of locally administered justice, will the Minister revisit the arrangements for the funding of local magistrates courts committees to see whether we ought to have a better formula than is currently applied? Does not the present formula lead to overfunding in some areas and underfunding in others, and to an end to locally administered justice?

Mr. Streeter: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has missed it by a mile. The Lord Chancellor and I are committed to local justice being dispensed by local people for local people, and the funding is in place. The hon. Gentleman commits the Labour party to yet more spending every time he gets to his feet in the House. Unless he can come to the Dispatch Box and tell us where that extra money would come from, he will have no credibility in this place.

Legal Aid

30. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he is taking to avoid legal aid being granted for vexatious litigation against schools. [7627]

Mr. Streeter: It is for the Legal Aid Board to decide whether to grant legal aid. To qualify for legal aid, applicants must satisfy the merits and means test. Because of our concern that too many trivial and undeserving cases are being funded by the taxpayer, the Government have proposed reforms in the White Paper, "Striking the Balance", which will target resources on the most deserving cases. In the mean time, my officials are discussing with both branches of the legal profession ways in which decisions under the existing merits test can be further improved.

Mr. Arnold: Would it not be an absolute scandal if yobbish failures were to use public money to sue their own schools? Would not that scandal be compounded if public money had to be diverted from education to allow those schools to defend themselves? If we are to have such an appalling waste of money, would it not be appropriate for the schools to use that money to sue the very yobs who failed to use that valuable commodity—their education? More than £1 billion of valuable public money is being spent on legal aid. Is that not an appalling waste in far too many cases? Would that not be compounded by the rather extraordinary idea of Lord Irvine of Lairg—the legal godfather of the Leader of the Opposition—who wants to extend the use of legal aid to industrial tribunals? Does not that show that, wherever one looks, the Labour party intends to waste more and more taxpayers' money?

Mr. Streeter: As usual, my hon. Friend speaks for many people in expressing concern about the amount of taxpayers' money spent on wasteful, trivial and undeserving cases. He refers to the case featured recently in the newspapers about people intending to sue their schools in relation to their lack of achievement. I can tell him and the House that no application has been made for legal aid for such a case—nor, I hope, will any be made. He is right to speak out on this case. If the Labour party ever formed a Government, it would be a disgrace if it spent yet more money not just on a law centre in every town, but on tribunals. Labour would rapidly become not just the prisoner's friend, but the barrister's meal ticket.

Magistrates Committees and Courts (Midlands)

31. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received regarding the proposed merger of Coventry, Birmingham and Solihull magistrates committees and courts. [7628]

Mr. Streeter: I have so far received 216 letters in response to the consultation document proposing an amalgamation of the Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull magistrates courts committees.

Mr. Cunningham: Given the concern expressed by magistrates, members of the public and organisations, will

the Minister agree to meet a delegation from Coventry to discuss the issue? Does he accept that we are not talking about more money for magistrates courts, but that he is proposing cuts in the services for magistrates courts?

Mr. Streeter: We are certainly not proposing any cuts in the services for magistrates courts, but I recognise the strength of feeling in the midlands about the proposed amalgamation of the magistrates courts committees in the hon. Gentleman's area. I would be delighted to receive a delegation from hon. Members in respect of that proposed amalgamation—I have already received several letters of representation on the subject from hon. Members.

European Court of Human Rights

32. **Sir Anthony Grant:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals for reform of procedures were made by the Lord Chancellor during his recent visit to the European Court of Human Rights. [7630]

Mr. Streeter: The Lord Chancellor had a wide-ranging and fruitful discussion with members of the court and the Commission, and advocated, once again, British proposals to improve the procedure of the European Court of Human Rights; to provide a high standard among judges appointed to the court; and to ensure that proper weight is given to the national character, traditions, religious beliefs and moral values of the countries that are signatories to the convention.

Sir Anthony Grant: Does my hon. Friend agree that that court, which is nothing to do with the European Union, has a pretty dismal record on pronouncements on subjects that affect this country, which it does not really understand? Will the better quality of judges, which must be welcomed, ensure that we do not have a repetition of the deplorable judgment in the so-called death on the rock case? Is not the recent blasphemy case, in which the court used the doctrine of marginal appreciation, a sign that common sense is, at last, breaking through?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend makes some important points about the European Court of Human Rights. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the European Union, a point that is not widely understood in the country. In fact, the court flows from a convention on human rights that was largely drafted by British people after the second world war. It is increasingly important as more and more countries sign up to the Council of Europe—for example, Russia and Croatia are signing up to the convention.

My hon. Friend makes the important point that, in the past, decisions have been made that caused grave offence in this country. It is to be hoped that our proposals in respect of the improvement of the quality of judges, and other procedural improvements—especially taking into account the national culture of each of the signatory countries—will significantly improve the court's performance.

Mr. Rooker: Does the Minister accept that it is not right to pick and choose decisions made by a court? I invite the Minister to look at history: it was that court, with the connivance of the Tory party, that effectively destroyed the pre-entry and post-entry closed shop in this country.

Mr. Streeter: I am delighted to hear that. The court has obviously performed a much more valuable function that I had ever dared to imagine. Of course it is wrong to pick and choose which decisions to adopt in this country. What I have said is that, because of proposals that we have made, the performance of the European Court of Human Rights in future is likely to be better and more acceptable to the British people than it has been in the past.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that the United Kingdom's legal system and the way in which we protect people who are discriminated against in various ways are emulated by other countries throughout the world and that we need no court in Europe telling us how to legislate?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend makes the important point that British justice is well known and our standards on human rights are much admired throughout the world, but it is important that we remain involved in the convention, so as to enable other countries that are developing the sort of society that we enjoy to establish high standards of human rights within their borders, hopefully with British help.

Judges and Magistrates (Ethnic Minorities)

33. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will take steps to increase the number of judges, masters and registrars of the High Court and magistrates from ethnic minorities. [7631]

Mr. Streeter: The Lord Chancellor has taken active steps to encourage people of ethnic minority origin to put themselves forward for consideration both for the professional judiciary and for the lay magistracy. He appoints and recommends for the professional judiciary the candidates who are best qualified, regardless of ethnic origin. With regard to the lay magistracy, he attaches great importance to the requirement that, subject to suitability for appointment on merit, lay benches reflect the community that they serve.

Mr. Cohen: Did the Parliamentary Secretary see the recent "Newsnight" programme that showed that black and Asian Britons are emerging from our academic institutions with qualifications in droves, but not finding their proper place in the British establishment? What are the Government doing to ensure that more black and Asian Britons become judges and magistrates?

Mr. Streeter: I know that the concept is alien to new Labour, but judges are appointed on merit, and at any moment the bench will reflect the legal profession from which its members are drawn. Things are moving in the right direction, but the most important thing is that we have judges of the right intellectual capacity, wisdom and common sense. We are moving in the right direction—an increasing number of people from all backgrounds are becoming judges—but we shall continue to appoint judges on merit and on nothing else.

European Council (Dublin)

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): With permission, Madam Speaker, I shall make a statement on the meeting of the European Council in Dublin on 13 and 14 December, which I attended with my right hon. and learned Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis). I have placed the conclusions of the Council in the Library of the House.

The main issues on the agenda were the intergovernmental conference and economic and monetary union.

The Council had a lengthy discussion on the prospects for the intergovernmental conference. Shortly beforehand, the Irish presidency had tabled a general outline for a draft revision of the treaty. That has been deposited in the House. It summarises fairly the position reached in the negotiations and the views of different member states. The views of the United Kingdom are fully reflected in it.

The Council conclusions reaffirm the target of completing the intergovernmental conference at the Amsterdam European Council in June 1997 and welcome the presidency document as a good basis for the work that lies ahead. That work was in no way prejudiced by the Council's conclusions in Dublin. We shall continue to advocate our own proposals and press our own concerns.

In discussion, I welcomed the progress made in a number of areas: subsidiarity, a greater role for national Parliaments, making the common foreign and security policy more effective, improving the quality of European legislation and introducing greater openness into the workings of the European Union.

I also spelled out the United Kingdom position on a number of key points. I see no purpose in a new employment chapter in the treaty. It will not create a single job. I do not accept that an enlarged European Union needs more qualified majority voting. On defence, we welcome co-operation between the European Union and the Western European Union, but not merger or subordination of decision making. I will not agree to justice and home affairs issues falling under Community competence. It is unthinkable that the United Kingdom would relinquish its frontier controls. I also emphasised our requirement for progress on quota hopping in the common fisheries policy and on the working time directive.

The outcome of the intergovernmental conference will do much to determine the future direction of the European Union. Some advocate a more integrated, centralised Europe. I respect that view, but I do not share it. It would not be right for Britain. I believe that the European Union must be a partnership of nation states, with Community competence where it is needed, but only where it is needed. This is more than a free trade area, but very much less than an embryo European state.

There is only one way in which those competing visions can be reconciled, and that is through the development of a more flexible Europe. That is one of the most important issues before the conference. Those who wish to integrate further in particular areas should not be frustrated unreasonably although, if they wish to use European Union institutions, they can proceed only through unanimity. Those who do not must not be forced into unwished-for obligations, which build up resentment.

I first set out the need for flexibility at Leiden some years ago, and it is now widely accepted. But we need to ensure that it is developed in a way that protects the vital interests of those who do not wish to integrate further in particular areas. There is much more work to be done here, and very little time in which to do it if the Amsterdam deadline is to be met.

Economic and monetary union was the subject of much interest, although the European Council did not itself discuss the issues at any great length. The Council agreed a report by Economic and Finance Ministers covering three issues on which my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has reported to the House on a number of occasions in recent weeks: the stability pact, the legal status of the euro and the new—voluntary—exchange rate mechanism. The conclusions, to which the Economic and Finance Council report is annexed, make it clear that those issues remain subject to our parliamentary reserve.

If the single currency goes ahead, it is a vital British interest—whether or not Britain is a member—that it succeeds; so I welcome the progress on the stability pact. The agreement reached strikes the right balance between the necessary discipline and the need for the Council of Ministers to retain control of the disciplinary process if individual countries get into difficulty.

The House will welcome the clear statements in the ECOFIN report that the arrangements for economic surveillance to be agreed for countries not in the single currency cannot lead to sanctions of any kind. I have made no secret of my doubts about whether enough countries will be sufficiently convergent to allow a single currency to go ahead on the present timetable. I repeated those doubts in Dublin. It is important that the figures themselves are not fudged, but whether or not particular countries meet particular targets on a particular day is less important than the extent of genuine economic readiness for such a far-reaching step. I am therefore pleased that the ECOFIN report makes clear the importance of not only achieving economic convergence on a particular day, but being able to sustain it over the long term.

I should also report that the president of the European Monetary Institute presented to the Council, and subsequently publicly, designs for the proposed single currency's banknotes. Those designs are the responsibility of the central banks—as, indeed, such designs are the responsibility of the Bank of England in this country now. Everyone will have their own views on those.

The decision on whether to go ahead with a single currency will be the most far-reaching decision that the European Union has ever taken. Although we expect to meet the required economic conditions, we have the right to decide whether or not we wish to join, if it goes ahead. We will make our decision when we are clear about all the necessary issues, including, crucially, our assessment of the prospect for real and sustained economic convergence.

The Council also discussed employment. Unemployment in this country is lower than in the other major European Union economies, and is falling faster. I circulated at the Council a paper on United Kingdom policies and their results, and commended it to our partners.

The Council adopted a declaration on unemployment. My agreement to it was subject to three conditions: that it confirmed that primary responsibility for employment policy rested with member states; that the European Union's approach remained based on the supply-side policies agreed at Essen in 1994; and that the declaration in no way prejudiced the question of an employment chapter in the treaty. Those conditions were agreed.

The European Council also discussed justice and home affairs, in which we welcome greater European co-operation, as long as it remains firmly on an intergovernmental basis. The Council confirmed the priority of the fight against drugs, and endorsed an Anglo-French initiative to combat transit and production of drugs in the central Asian republics. It called for ratification of the Europol convention by the end of 1997—achieved only by the United Kingdom so far—and agreed that Europol, the European Police Office, should work in conjunction with national agencies to support the fight against international crime. The Council also created a high-level group to draw up an action plan against organised crime, welcomed joint actions against sexual exploitation of children and trafficking in human beings, and confirmed the need for intensified co-operation against terrorism.

I briefed my colleagues on the steps that we have taken to eradicate bovine spongiform encephalopathy, notably progress under the 30-month slaughter scheme. I sought and received confirmation that future decisions on lifting the ban would be taken on the basis of science, as agreed at Florence. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be making a statement a little later on the next steps.

On foreign policy, the Council endorsed the London conference document on Bosnia as an excellent basis for work next year. On the middle east, the declaration that was issued reflected our concern about the current state of the peace process. The Council also expressed its strong interest in a smooth transition to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region next year and its support for the existing representative democratic institutions of Hong Kong. That was a welcome endorsement of our approach.

The European Union is approaching some historic decisions over the next 18 months, both on a single currency and on its future direction. The result of the intergovernmental conference may well mark a crucial turning point in Europe's development. The President of the European Commission said last week that the moment of truth lies ahead. There is one sense at least in which he is right. The choices that are made will determine not only the success and stability of Europe as a whole, but Britain's relationship with it.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): First, I should like to state our unequivocal support for the measures that were agreed on co-operation to fight terrorism, organised crime, drugs and crimes against children. I also place on record our continuing support for the process of enlargement. On the IGC, we restate our agreement to justice and home affairs remaining outside Community competence, as in other essential areas such as taxation and defence. I agree with the Prime Minister on the issues of subsidiarity and the common foreign and security policy.

On the issue of flexibility—certain states moving ahead without others—does the Prime Minister agree that if that meant some states forming an inner core in the European Union and moving ahead in certain areas without the consent of others, that would be potentially dangerous to Britain's interests?

I shall come straight to the two principal issues that arise—BSE and the single currency. We were told prior to Dublin that the Government were about to pull off a deal lifting the beef ban. Where is that deal?

Sir Jim Spicer (West Dorset): That is unreasonable.

Mr. Blair: That is supposed to be unreasonable, is it? Is it not now six months since the Florence summit, when we were told that a deal had been reached and that, as I recall, the ban would be lifted by November? After six months, is it not a fact that not a single piece of progress on lifting the ban has been made? Six months on, we are apparently back to the Florence agreement. Meanwhile, our farmers are suffering and it seems that the cost to the Exchequer is likely to rise to more than £3 billion.

Has not this whole affair been handled with serial incompetence? It is not unreasonable to ask: what is the timetable now? November has passed—what is the new date? In his statement, the Prime Minister said that decisions are now to be taken on the cull and elsewhere on scientific evidence. Apparently the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said at lunchtime, "If one was to try to justify the cull in terms of the science, one would be in some difficulty." If Ministers of the same Government cannot get the same line right on the same day, is it any wonder that we are in the mess that we are on this issue?

On a single currency, the Prime Minister made much of the parliamentary reserve. Can he confirm, as the communiqué makes plain, that the vital decisions—some of them the most important that Europe has faced, as he rightly says—have been made? Will he confirm in terms of the stability pact that he and the Chancellor have agreed not only the deficit limits, but a system of penalties, rules for exceptional circumstances and a means of enforcement? Have they not also agreed that convergence programmes for those out of the single currency will be made obligatory? Plans will have to be submitted every year, with provisions for default. On exchange rate co-operation, have they not also agreed a system of assessment and monitoring, even for those outside any new exchange rate mechanism arrangement?

Therefore, on the parliamentary reserve, which is the Prime Minister's fallback position, may I put this to him? When will those issues be voted on in the House? When will we get the chance to explore those matters? Will he at least give us an undertaking that we shall have that vote before the general election? I think from that smile that the answer is no. I think that it is fair enough to say, however, that the only reason why we are not getting the chance is that the right hon. Gentleman is afraid to face the House of Commons' verdict on those issues. The whole point about the parliamentary reserve is that, if we were to change the position in any way, he could go back to our European partners and renegotiate. Is he seriously saying that, as a result of the reserve, he could credibly renegotiate decisions that had been taken?

How does the Prime Minister's position of keeping open the options on a single currency square with the extraordinary unilateral declaration of independence in today's *The Daily Telegraph*, from 147 Conservative

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candidates, who said, effectively, that they would now stand on a different manifesto from the Government's at the next election? After all, it was the Prime Minister who said that it was self-evident that Tory divisions on Europe were damaging Britain's interests. I simply ask him, and again I think that this is not unreasonable: what could be more damaging than almost 150 candidates openly disagreeing with the Government's position and over half of them saying that they would never, ever join a single currency—and some of them want to come out of the European Union altogether? How does that make for credibility in negotiation? It is only fair to ask the Prime Minister to deal precisely with those 150 candidates, with their different manifesto.

Is not the real test in Europe success or failure, strength or weakness, and "Can we get a good deal for Britain?", and, as a result of those divisions, exemplified by 150 candidates effectively forming a party within a party, are we not in a weaker position than Britain has been in for 25 years?

The Prime Minister: Let me first welcome what the right hon. Gentleman said about his support for the terrorism measures, for enlargement and for subsidiarity. I also welcome the other points of agreement at the outset of his remarks.

On flexibility, I have made the point on a number of occasions that, if some of our colleagues moot the prospect of flexibility, which means an inner core going ahead on its own, that would be utterly unacceptable, unless there were areas in which they went ahead by unanimity, so that every other member of the European Union agreed. However, in relation to any form of flexibility, if people propose to use the institutions of the European Union, those institutions belong to all EU members, not just some of them, and I have made the point to our partners that there can no prospect of an inner core going ahead on its own, other than by unanimity. The prospect of their going ahead on a wide front would fundamentally change the whole nature of the EU and is not the sort of flexibility that would be in the interests either of this country or of the EU as a whole.

On the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about BSE, the point that he frequently overlooks whenever he raises that matter in the House is the changed scientific evidence, which appeared after the Florence agreement was reached, about maternal transmission and other matters. That is what has changed the timetable for us. My right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will make a detailed statement about the way forward in a few moments.

On a single currency, the parliamentary reserve applies to all the matters in the stability pact, not of course to the matters agreed in the Maastricht criteria some time ago, some of which the right hon. Gentleman listed as if they had most recently appeared in the stability pact and had never been seen on a previous occasion. On the exchange rate mechanism, that remains entirely voluntary, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made clear on a number of occasions.

On convergence for countries outside the new euro zone, if it is created, the reports to which the right hon. Gentleman refers—I assume that he is referring to the routine surveillance reports that have been made by the House for some time—have no binding obligations at all and the circumstance does not change in any way.

On the manifestos of some of my colleagues, I have to tell the right hon. Gentleman that we did not discuss those at all at the summit, but, of all hon. Members, the right hon. Gentleman is on rather thin ice in raising the question of manifestos, because I recall what his 1983 manifesto said. He said that he would like to come out of Europe. He wanted to scrap Trident. He also wanted to end nuclear weapons. It is self-evident that, sometimes, what is put in a manifesto is not necessarily maintained by individual Members thereafter. The right hon. Gentleman is not in a position to make the points that he made.

On the question of a good deal for the United Kingdom, I have to tell the right hon. Gentleman that if he were to negotiate while still following the policies that he has advocated so far, the Amsterdam summit would be a Dutch auction of British sovereignty. He told his party conference that he would never allow himself to be isolated. He cannot negotiate if he is not isolated. He would surrender the veto in social policy, surrender the veto in industrial policy—

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): Ridiculous.

The Prime Minister: I tell the Opposition Chief Whip that it is ridiculous to surrender it, but that is the policy that the right hon. Gentleman is pressing upon his party. He would also surrender the veto on regional policy and on environmental policy. He would sign up to the social chapter and to the working time directive. He would back a new treaty on employment. Were he to go to Amsterdam, by the time he came back, there would be a great dent in British sovereignty.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I thank my right hon. Friend for the major contribution made by the United Kingdom to the successful Dublin summit. Is not it a statement of fact that our strong opt-out on joining a single currency and our policy of wait and see, which are strongly supported in this country as the only rational stance, do not in any way gainsay the need for further discussion on the merits of a single currency?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Maintaining our position is the right and sensible way to proceed, so that we can not only retain the flexibility for Britain to make a decision in Britain's interests, but have the maximum opportunity to influence others in decisions that will affect this country.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Does the Prime Minister accept that many of the problems that we face in the European Union today—notably with the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy—were caused by our opting out of the original negotiations that framed the rules? If so, does he accept that the British national interest is again being damaged, because he is seen by other European Governments and by the British public as being held hostage by a Conservative party whose policy is increasingly not to be at the heart of Europe, but to be out of Europe?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman will know that I have made it clear that we are not opting out

of the negotiations in the matters that lie immediately ahead of us. We propose to play a full part in the intergovernmental conference and in the decision-making process leading up to a determination of whether a single currency proceeds.

There are two elements in the determination about a single currency—first, whether the circumstances are right for anyone to proceed; and secondly, whether the circumstances are right for any individual country, including the United Kingdom, to proceed. The determination of whether every country proceeds is actually made by a qualified majority vote in due course. If we think that other countries are not economically ready to enter a single currency—because their entry into a single currency and their weakening of a single currency, if it proceeded, would damage this country, whether in or not—we retain the option to vote against their entry. I certainly intend to play a full part in the negotiations.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): My right hon. Friend said that he was opposed to any country entering a single currency if it could not sustain its position economically, or if it somehow fudged its entry economically. Therefore, during the conference, did my right hon. Friend say anything about the countries that are clearly fudging their entry criteria—such as France, which has abused the process by stealing money from its telecoms fund? Did he warn France that if it continued to do that, Britain would raise it as a major issue again and again and again and declare itself against the process?

The Prime Minister: I made it clear that we would look carefully at the economic conditions to ensure that they were right, genuine and had not been fudged. I did not raise the specific matter of the French telecoms fund. When the time comes to make a judgment, we shall certainly take into account any actions that appear to us to be short-term fudges rather than a long-term improvement in the economic condition of countries going into a single currency. It was precisely to make it clear that that would be our position that I emphasised—not only today, but in the discussions over the weekend—that we would examine not only whether people met the criteria on the specific day that the initial decision was taken, but whether it was likely that they could maintain compliance with the criteria over the long term.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Does the Prime Minister recognise that the question of a single currency—which is a political, not an economic question—goes far beyond the interests of this or of any other country? Ministers have agreed in principle to transfer major political powers from Governments, whom the peoples of the European Union elect, to bankers, whom they do not. Given the situation in France, Germany, Italy and Spain—where, for many years, their peoples were denied, by Hitler, Mussolini, Franco and Salazar, the right to use the ballot box to attempt to remedy their grievances—is it really sensible, in principle, to be in favour of giving up those powers? Is not one reminded of the words of Sir Edward Grey, in 1914:

"The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime"?

The Prime Minister: It seems to me that there may be some interesting manifestos from the Opposition, as well as from some of my hon. Friends. The only sensible conclusion that one can draw from the right hon. Gentleman's comments—I appreciate the sincerity with which he advances his view, as he has done consistently for many years—is that we should remain in the negotiations to point out the dangers that we may see. I think that he would be forced to agree that that is the logical conclusion to be drawn from what he has said.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, were the Leader of the Opposition to allow a free vote on this issue, more than three quarters of the House would support my right hon. Friend's policy on Europe? That question comes from a sceptic on a single currency, who is not even angling for a job.

The Prime Minister: The accuracy of my hon. Friend's prediction marks him out as a future Chief Whip, if that is a job that interests him.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): My congratulations. The Prime Minister made it clear that the current state of the peace process in the middle east was discussed. Was the issue raised that that American Zionist, Netanyahu, is endangering the extremely fragile peace in that part of the world, and that something must be done internationally to restrain that gentleman in consistently breaking the Oslo accords, to which the Israeli Government are committed?

The Prime Minister: There was certainly a collective view that the agreements reached previously had to be met and kept, and that there was some need for urgent progress. No one pointed to the specific cause of the current disagreements; I think that there was a general feeling that there may be faults in many directions. However, the unanimous view was that there was a need for early progress.

Mr. Norman Lamont (Kingston upon Thames): What example in history is there of a single paper currency that is not tied to a single Government?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend points to the fact that we are entering uncharted waters, and I agree with him. That fact is precisely why I am so cautious. It is why my right hon. Friend and I negotiated the option for us to decide at a later date, and it is why he and I set out the convergence criteria. The fact that we are entering waters where no one has been before is precisely why it is right for us to be cautious and right for us to examine the economic circumstances. My right hon. Friend is right.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Given that we can all see the detailed arrangements for a single currency, what is the Prime Minister waiting for? Is it not time for him to make up his mind one way or the other, instead of sitting on the fence?

The Prime Minister: I am interested in the fact that the hon. Gentleman knows all the circumstances. Does he know what the legal conditions are yet? The Governments do not. Does he know who will enter yet? The Governments do not. Does he know who will meet the

[The Prime Minister]

economic criteria? The Governments do not. I can extend that list. Clearly, the hon. Gentleman has knowledge that the rest of us have not yet had.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): In seeking to protect our vital national interests in Dublin and to promote a non-federalist vision of Europe, can my right hon. Friend say what problems are being caused for him and our interests by the belief in some European quarters that after the general election there will be in London a more subservient, compliant, inexperienced and subordinate Government?

The Prime Minister: There is no doubt that there is a wish among some of our partners with socialist Governments to have a similar Government in the United Kingdom, who would be prepared to surrender the elements of British sovereignty that I set out earlier. I understand that wish, but they also understand the timetable; on that basis, I think that they are beginning to understand the need to negotiate with us now and, I believe, in Amsterdam.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): If the Prime Minister had any remaining, lingering doubts about the folly of joining a single currency, surely he had them resolved at Dublin. Of course, we already knew that, if we were to join a single currency, the stability pact would impose vast fines on us—fines amounting to more than £11 billion if it had been in effect for only the past four years. However, we did not know what was the crucial, as it were, exception—the temporary and exceptional circumstances in which there would be exemption from the penalties of the treaty. Now we know that it is the massively deflationary fall of 2 per cent. in gross domestic product, an experience that this country has not suffered in the post-war period. That wholly deflationary policy would be permitted under such a guideline. Does not the Prime Minister recognise that that is unacceptable and that it would be masochism and madness for us to join?

The Prime Minister: But of course, the right hon. Gentleman is wrong in what he has to say about the vast fines that would have been inflicted on us in the past, as he will see if he reads more carefully what my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor discussed with his ECOFIN colleagues.

As for the general point, the policy relies not only on the 2 per cent. criterion, but on an overall case-by-case assessment. The only circumstances in which a fine would be levied—of course, it would be levied only on a country that was in the new euro zone—would be if the country was not only defaulting but making no effort whatever to correct the default. That is why it has been left to a decision of Ministers.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I greatly welcome the determination shown by the Prime Minister at Dublin and, in particular, by the final sentence of today's statement, but will he outline the importance that he places on the elimination of quota hopping? Is it something that the Government are merely hoping to achieve or something that they will demand be achieved if we are to have a new treaty?

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear at the weekend, we think that it is essential to achieve the necessary change.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): The Prime Minister talked about vetoes, but is it not the case that the only veto that really counts with this Government is that exercised by the Europhobic malcontents on the Government Back Benches and their fellow travellers in the Cabinet?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman should ask more sensible questions than that with his knowledge. If he had chosen to look around him, he might have directed his remarks about Europhobism in quite a different direction.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many of my constituents to whom I spoke this weekend were delighted that he was negotiating hard in Dublin and that they are more worried than they have been for 25 years about our future relationship with Europe, but that the cruellest delusion would be to suppose that we could terminate our membership of the European Union at a stroke and that everything would then be all right?

The Prime Minister: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. That is a delusion, and the people who peddle that delusion are certainly not considering what the British national interest would be or what the implications of leaving the European Union would be. Our position must surely be the one that I sought to set out a few moments ago: we are not prepared to move towards what I called an embryonic super-state across Europe, but we agree that our relationship with the European Union is more than a simple trading relationship, as indeed it has been since the day we signed the treaty of Rome.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Did I hear the Prime Minister aright in his opening statement, saying that, in his opinion, it was a vital British interest, whether we were in or out, that the single currency should succeed? If he believes that, is there not a strong case for getting in and influencing it as soon as possible? Are we correct in believing that Michael Patijn, on behalf of the Dutch Government, has made various statements about what the 14 nations would do if, as they saw it, there was a lack of co-operation from a British Government? What would we do then?

The Prime Minister: The treaty cannot be agreed without 15. I have not heard the threats to which the hon. Gentleman refers, and I have no idea whether they were made. They have been made by people in the past, and I regard them as dismissible.

If a single currency goes ahead and fails, the impact across the European Union will be dramatic, not just for those who are in the currency. That is the point that I was seeking to emphasise to the House. If it looks as if it will not succeed—because the convergence criteria will not be

met, or for some other reason—we shall urge everyone not to go ahead. If it went ahead and failed, I believe that the implications for this country would be profound—less profound, perhaps, than if we were in it, but certainly profound.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Given our worries about the attitude of some of our partners and the deal that they have offered us, what benefits did the Government secure for waiving our vetoes over the stability pact and the legalisation of the euro? Is the Prime Minister worried about Franco-German domination of the agenda, and does he not think that we need to offer an alternative?

The Prime Minister: On the stability pact, as I have just said to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), we think that if the euro zone goes ahead, it is essential that it succeeds. One of the mechanisms for making sure that sensible policies are carried out is the discipline of the stability pact, so we favour the stability pact. On that basis, it was unlikely that I would exercise a veto over it.

The veto is a necessary weapon that we have to use in areas of great national interest to the United Kingdom. When necessary, I will use the veto. I do not intend to abuse it and I do not intend to use the veto every time I have a disagreement with my European partners, but on matters of significant national interest, it must be clear to them that we will use it, because that would be the wish of the House and in the interests of this country.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): The Prime Minister welcomed what he described as progress on subsidiarity. Will he explain to the House why, in his view, the principle of subsidiarity must be applied within the European Union, but must not be applied within the Union that is the United Kingdom? Surely it is wholly inconsistent to raise the banner of subsidiarity in one multinational union while simultaneously lowering it in another multinational union. Why cannot the Scots have their own elected parliament? Why cannot the Welsh have their own elected assembly? Why must subsidiarity always stop short in this unreformed place?

The Prime Minister: A great deal of responsibility and devolution has gone to Scotland, to Wales and to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. If the hon. Gentleman cannot see the difference between 15 historic and sovereign nations and one United Kingdom, where a voluntary association has been entered into for so long, he should look more carefully.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Is my right hon. Friend aware that probably the most important thing that he said in his statement was that he intends to be obdurate about the so-called flexibility pact from France and Germany? He is right to cling to the safety catch of unanimity. Will he guarantee that he will continue that approach in Amsterdam and beyond?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. A flexible approach set out solely to provide a mechanism for a small core of countries to go ahead on their own, perhaps against the interests of the rest of the European Union, would not be acceptable. Any flexibility of that sort would need to be agreed by unanimity.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Prime Minister needs to be reminded that Scotland is a historic and sovereign nation. Did the Prime Minister see the remarks attributed to a member of the Irish presidential delegation that, given that the Prime Minister has kept the rest of us waiting for six months before honouring the commitments on the Florence agreement, it is difficult to take seriously any sense of urgency that he now expresses on BSE? How can the right hon. Gentleman cite maternal transmission as evidence for the delay, when the selective cull to be announced today does not include those animals? Who is responsible for the botch-up and the delay, and does the right hon. Gentleman accept any responsibility for the lost livelihoods throughout rural communities?

The Prime Minister: We have provided about £2.5 billion precisely to protect the beef industry across the United Kingdom after the health scares that arose following the scientific evidence about BSE. [HON. MEMBERS: "The cull?"] I shall come to that.

What no one anticipated at Florence or afterwards were two factors. First, there was the changed scientific evidence to which I referred a moment ago. Secondly, I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman or anyone else realised the sheer weight of animals that would need to come forward under the over-30-month scheme. More than 1 million animals have now been slaughtered—a figure that no one anticipated at the time. The fact that it has been possible to achieve that is the result of a remarkable feat of organisation by my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. What we have done throughout the exercise is to put first and foremost the long-term interests of the beef industry. That we continue to do.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): As the Prime Minister has told the country that he is in Europe to get a good deal for the people of this country, does he not recognise that the lobbying by his Minister recently in Brussels for the destruction of Sunday as a special day and his success in getting written into the health directive that Sunday would no longer be a special day outrage many working-class people who have always observed Sunday as at least a family day? What does the Prime Minister think about the overwhelming vote in the Strasbourg Parliament, which said this week that Sunday should be returned to being a special day? What has he to say about that?

The Prime Minister: Many people believe that Sunday should be a special day. That is an article of faith for them and I do not wish to destroy that article of faith. It is a choice made by literally millions of people, as the hon. Gentleman said. I assume that his earlier remarks related to the concerns about the 48-hour working week. The hon. Gentleman is wrong to attribute to that the statement that the Government have not had the same respect for Sunday as he has.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): May I press the right hon. Gentleman about the rights

[Mr. Ted Rowlands]

of this House? As he has agreed both the principles and the outline of a stability pact, when will he seek approval for his agreement in the House?

The Prime Minister: As I said in reply to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), we place a parliamentary reserve on the matter and the decision will be brought before the House in the usual way, following discussions between the usual channels.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Will my right hon. Friend assure the country that no concession by our European partners on the working time directive, on beef exports, on quota hopping or on anything else will cause us to agree to surrender to European Union competence third-pillar matters of home affairs, justice and, in particular, border controls?

The Prime Minister: I can give my hon. and learned Friend a categorical assurance on that point.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): If it is true that more than 140 Conservative candidates at the next general election will stand on a platform of no single currency at any price, does that mean that if there is a referendum, they will totally ignore the result, even if it says that the judgment of the British people is that we should enter the single currency?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is basing his remarks on the proposition that what has been reported is accurate. I do not know whether it is accurate and I have no idea how many of those 147 will be in the House. What I can say is that I will take responsibility for our manifesto commitment; I will set it out and keep it.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): As one who strongly supports my right hon. Friend's line on the single currency and believes that it is a wise one that merits united support on the Conservative Benches, may I ask him why he has not pressed on his European colleagues the great merits of the hard ecu—the common parallel currency—which he championed so sensibly some years ago?

The Prime Minister: I continue to believe that that would have been a sensible, market-driven way in which people could have decided whether they wished to move to a common currency. It had the additional advantage that a common currency could have circulated alongside domestic currencies, so that we could have had parallel currencies. Undoubtedly, that was a sensible way forward which, from time to time, I have pressed on my colleagues. I am afraid that they will not anticipate doing it unless or until they discover that a single currency either cannot proceed, or proceeds but does not work.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): For the sake of eliminating any residual doubt and ambiguity, can my right hon. Friend assure the House that, at the Amsterdam summit, the next Conservative Government will veto the revised treaty if our concerns about quota hopping and the effect of the working time directive on employment are not met by treaty changes?

The Prime Minister: We have made it clear that we expect to achieve those changes. We do not expect to agree a treaty unless we obtain the changes that we seek.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): We all know that the Prime Minister has double standards and that his whole attitude towards the European Union is predicated not on the national interest, but on the interests of the Conservative party, and is a way of protecting himself from the Euro-loonies behind him. We have become the laughing stock of Europe. Is that what the Prime Minister meant when he said that he wanted to put the United Kingdom at the heart and the centre of Europe?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman, of course, is a new federalist, although that is not his old position. He has clearly changed his previous electoral convictions. My conviction that what we must put forward is in the national interest has been my position from the outset. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that that is not so, I am bound to tell him that my life would have been much easier had I not taken that position.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Did the Prime Minister tell his colleagues in Dublin, on the question of surrendering large dollops of sovereignty, that a Tory Government took Britain into the Common Market in the first place, another Tory Government, whom he supported, voted for the Single European Act on a guillotine in the House and another Tory Government, led by him, signed the Maastricht treaty? Is not the truth of the matter that, in the run-up to the general election, the Prime Minister has sought to pacify some of his Back Benchers by waving the Union Jack in the hope of getting a few votes, when in reality he is no different from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who sits beside him?

The Prime Minister: There was an intriguing endorsement in the hon. Gentleman's last sentence. No one would suggest that there is no difference between the hon. Gentleman and the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Skinner: Yes.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman admits it. That is excellent. It will be another manifesto that we shall read with interest in our examination of manifestos.

Mr. Skinner: Answer the question.

The Prime Minister: I am about to, but the hon. Gentleman will not like the answer. As he is so concerned about dollops of sovereignty, perhaps he should state in the parliamentary Labour party his views on the dollops of sovereignty that the Labour party is committed to surrendering. They relate to social policy, industrial policy and regional policy. Would the hon. Gentleman surrender sovereignty on those issues? He would not and neither would his hon. Friends. Perhaps we should have a show of hands. *[Interruption.]* Every time one of 50 Labour

Members stands up, the bogus view of Labour Front-Bench Members that there is unity in the Labour party is blown to pieces.

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): An article in *The Daily Telegraph* today—the most sensible item in that newspaper for several years—points out that between what are described as the extremes of visionary Euro-idealism and chauvinistic Euro-scepticism lies the path of realistic British Europeanism. Does my right hon. Friend agree, and will he and his Ministers continue to follow that path in their dealings with our European partners?

The Prime Minister: I do and I will.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Prime Minister referred to the ratification of the Europol treaty under article K.3 of the Maastricht treaty. Will he confirm that that was done entirely by the royal prerogative, with no examination by the House? On 3 December, in relation to a statutory instrument, the Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), said that Europol would have no operational powers in the field and would have no operational arm. Is the Prime Minister aware that this morning's communiqué on the topic says that Europol should have operational powers, which will be discussed in conjunction with the national authorities? Does he agree that that illustrates that the great danger is not from a federal state, where there is no separation of powers, but from the development of a unitary state, which will effectively eliminate the powers of this House and of the national Government?

The Prime Minister: I think that I can reassure the hon. Gentleman on the last point. The conclusions make it clear that Europol is to work in conjunction with national authorities. Its role is to assist national law enforcement agencies, not to replace them. The hon. Gentleman can be reassured on that point.

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid–Sussex): May I congratulate the Prime Minister on the stance that he took in the difficult circumstances at the summit? Following Dublin, does he agree that, whatever the contents of a stability pact, without general and well-informed consent to joining economic and monetary union, a single currency may well prove fragile? On that basis, would he consider asking the Bank of England, which last week issued a booklet to businesses, to write an independent plain man's guide to the single currency and economic and monetary union, setting out the advantages and disadvantages for the ordinary family, and to send a copy to every household in the land?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my right hon. Friend's analysis. In the wrong circumstances, a single currency would be fragile. I understand that the Bank of England is shortly to produce another guide. Whether it will be a plain man's guide, I cannot tell my right hon. Friend, as I have not yet seen it, but I shall bear in mind his wider point.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Was anything said at the Dublin summit about the mass demonstrations in several member states in protest at the convergence criteria, which in many cases involve, as the Prime Minister knows, substantial cuts in public expenditure? Bearing in mind the implications for economic and political sovereignty that would arise from joining EMU on the basis of a single currency, is it not unthinkable that any such decision could be taken in the next Parliament without a referendum on the issue?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the hon. Gentleman on the last point. If a Conservative Government were to decide to go into a single European currency, there would have to be a referendum on that for all electors in the country. The hon. Gentleman is entirely right about that. He is also right to point to the concerns that exist in some member states, but I must tell him that the matter was not specifically raised in our discussions.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): May I warmly commend my right hon. Friend's espousal of a market-driven common currency, rather than a politically driven single currency? Can he confirm that our partners will be demanding a decision from us on a single currency by the end of the coming year? Was there any discussion, informally or formally, about Italy and Belgium's debt being 120 per cent. of GDP? In the circumstances, will my right hon. Friend consider in the early summer ruling out the prospect of our joining a single currency, on the basis that the economic convergence criteria are not so much being fiddled or fudged, but trampled on in the Gadarene rush towards a disastrous single currency that Europe cannot sustain?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right about what would happen if the criteria are wrong, whether it happens to be the debt criteria or any of the other convergence criteria, for that matter. I do not foresee any real likelihood that most member states will not reach the inflation criteria—I think it overwhelmingly likely that they will—but whether they will meet the 3 per cent. deficit criteria or the debt criteria is a different matter. I think that over the next few months we shall see a number of projections from individual member states about the likely deficits that they foresee for next year, which will add to our knowledge. There should also be some international examinations of international currencies, which will add a great deal to the assessment of whether the criteria will be met. I expect that, in some cases, the position will become clearer in the months ahead.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): As the greatest danger to the sustainability of the 3 per cent. borrowing requirement for the single currency is the 18 million people who are unemployed in Europe—2 million of whom are in this country, which is in fact more than when the Prime Minister took office—is it not ludicrous to oppose the idea of co-ordinating employment policies in Europe by adhering to an employment chapter in the Maastricht treaty, which would enable this country to work with our partners at the heart of Europe?

The Prime Minister: The EU agreed in 1994 at Essen a way in which it was felt at the time we could all best tackle unemployment. That was largely by supply-side measures, of the sort with which the House has become

[The Prime Minister]

familiar over recent years, which are generally putting people back to work. Those decisions are taken in nation states and self-evidently could not be taken at the centre. We find ourselves opposed to the prospect of Community communal decisions—almost certainly expenditure decisions—leading to larger contributions from each nation state, with the intention of creating short-term jobs. That is not the way in which to create jobs and remain competitive for the future. Although we are perfectly happy to co-ordinate, we are not prepared to have decisions taken in Brussels which will impact on the domestic decisions that we are taking to bring down unemployment.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Will my right hon. Friend reflect on opinion in my constituency? I judge that there is a majority who want to stay in a Common Market and a majority who are against a single currency. I sense that every step taken closer to a single currency enlarges the minority of my constituents who want to pull out altogether, which I believe would be a disaster. Does he therefore accept that the best way in which to ensure that we stay in a Common Market is to review our policy on a single currency now?

The Prime Minister: I understand my hon. Friend's feeling and entirely agree with him that a very large majority of people in this country believe that we should stay in the EU, but share some of the unease that I, he and others have expressed about the direction and drift of some elements of European policy. I do not, however, believe that the right thing to do would be to determine that we should effectively disengage from the most important decision that Europe will take. Our input into that decision may have a material impact on whether the whole prospect goes ahead or does not if the criteria are wrong. If it went ahead in the wrong circumstances, the damage to our membership of the EU and to the EU itself might well be fatal. I share my hon. Friend's view; we are best in the EU, but not in what I called an embryo super-state. I believe that we should keep open that middle road in the interests of the UK.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Thank you. We must now move to the second statement.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

4.27 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Douglas Hogg): With permission, I should like to make a statement on our follow-up to the Florence agreement on BSE and the additional steps that the Government intend to take towards the eventual lifting of the ban on exports of beef from the United Kingdom.

The agreement that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister negotiated at Florence defined five general preconditions for the lifting of the ban. Since that agreement was made, we have succeeded in fulfilling four of them, which are as follows.

The first precondition was an improved system of animal identification and movement recording. Cattle passports are now issued to all cattle born since 1 July, recording details of each animal's identity and movement. We have so far issued 751,000 such passports. As I announced on 10 December, we are also pressing ahead with proposals for a computerised cattle-tracing system in Great Britain. The second was the removal of meat and bonemeal from farms and feed mills. Action was taken during the summer to retrieve the last remaining stocks of meat and bonemeal from the animal feed chain. A total ban on possessing MBM where animal feed is handled came into force on 1 August.

The third general precondition was the removal of specified bovine material in slaughterhouses. The rules on removal of those parts of the carcase that can harbour the infective agent are being enforced with great rigour. More than 450 additional inspectors have been taken on. Statistics show that the rules are now being fully complied with. The fourth was the slaughter and destruction of cattle aged over 30 months. Since 1 May, more than 1 million cattle aged over 30 months have been killed and removed from the human food chain.

As the House will know, the last precondition, as yet not implemented, is the selective cull of animals judged to be most at risk of BSE. On 19 September, the Government postponed the cull while we considered the implications of the latest scientific evidence not known at the time of the Florence agreement and the range of cull options put to us. We also wanted further to explore the possibility of securing a lifting of the export ban in respect of meat from animals from certified herds and we judged it necessary to clear the backlog of cattle awaiting slaughter under the over-30-months scheme before proceeding to any selective cull.

I am glad to say that we have now cleared the backlog in Great Britain and will very shortly do so in Northern Ireland. That has been a considerable achievement. Slaughtering and disposing of well over 1 million animals in seven months has been an enormous logistical exercise, and I pay tribute to the crucial role played by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, by all my noble and hon. Friends in the Agriculture Departments and, in particular, by my hon. Friend the Minister of State. The over-30-months scheme backlog is no longer an impediment to the selective cull.

We have concluded that the scientific evidence is unlikely to change decisively the basis of the selective cull as agreed in Florence. Moreover, opinion within the industry has changed: for example, the National Farmers

Union, formerly hostile to the selective cull, is now, together with the other farming unions, strongly in favour of carrying out the cull agreed at Florence. Against that background, we have decided that now is the time to bring forward our proposals for a selective cull in accordance with the terms of the Florence agreement, and I shall be so informing the Agriculture Council tomorrow.

Furthermore, we are now ready with proposals for a United Kingdom certified herd scheme, which we will table as a basis for negotiating the first step in relaxing the ban. We have issued our proposals today for consultation and I have placed a copy in the Library of the House. I shall submit the paper formally to the Commission early in the new year and press for discussions in the Standing Veterinary Committee to begin as soon as possible. Again, I shall inform the Agriculture Council tomorrow.

We cannot be certain how many animals will be affected by the cull, not least because many beasts from the cohorts in question will have gone out already under the over-30-months scheme. However, it is certain that implementing the cull will be a complex business. We need to act expeditiously. My intention is that the necessary orders should be signed before the recess, together with the appropriate statutory rules for Northern Ireland. Should the House so desire—that is to say, should the relevant order be prayed against—there will be a debate before any compulsory slaughter of exposed animals is carried out in Great Britain.

The Exchequer cost of the programme will self-evidently depend on the number of animals to be slaughtered. Our original estimate of 128,000 is clearly out of date. Many of those animals will already have been slaughtered under the over-30-months scheme, although we cannot at the moment be certain of the exact number. If, for example, we were required to deal with about 100,000 animals, the gross cost would be about £150 million and the net cost about £90 million. The difference is accounted for by contributions from European Union funds and by corresponding savings under the over-30-months scheme.

The House will know that we have been researching whether there is any maternal transmission of BSE. As yet, we have not received conclusive advice on the point. I hope that by March next year I shall be in a better position to advise the House. In the mean time, the Government have concluded that uncertainty on that point is not a reason for delaying the start of the cull, but we are ready to modify the cull if the advice that we receive provides a proper justification for so doing.

Our aim is to complete the cull within about six months of when we start, although the tracing of animals that have moved out of affected cohorts might take a little longer. The Agriculture Departments will send to all cattle farmers a document setting out how we intend to proceed. On compensation, the arrangements will be as I set out to the House on 24 July. For male animals, that means market value; for female animals, either 90 per cent. of replacement value or the animal's market value, whichever is the higher. There will be a top-up for those who lose more than 10 per cent. of their herds and an enhancement for closed herds.

Inevitably, some parts of the United Kingdom will make more rapid progress than others, but I wish to stress that both the cull and our proposals for lifting the ban in respect of certified herds will be UK-wide in their application. We regard this as but the first step towards the complete lifting of the ban on the export of cattle, beef and beef products from the United Kingdom.

Finally, the House should not be under any illusion as to how quickly a selective cull will lead to a resumption of exports of British beef. We will now pursue discussions in Brussels as rapidly as possible. That process may take longer than we would wish. Member states will insist on a thorough examination of the proposals. Indeed, the Florence agreement itself provided that the ban is likely to be lifted on a step-by-step basis over a period of time.

However, of one thing I am absolutely certain. Unless we commit ourselves to the selective cull, the entire ban will remain in place for the foreseeable future. A selective cull is an indispensable precondition to obtaining any lifting of the ban. Implementing it will enable us to press vigorously for a lifting of the ban, starting with certified herds. For that policy we have the support of the farming unions and I hope that I will also have the support of the House.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Well, well, Madam Speaker. May I remind the Minister and the House that after the Florence summit the Prime Minister presented the agreement as a great triumph and told us that by November we would have met all the conditions to enable beef and beef products that can be sold in this country to be sold throughout Europe and the world? He told us that the ban would be lifted completely. May I also remind the Minister that he described the Florence agreement as a great success, which provided a solid way forward? Does the Minister accept that the fact that, one month after the Prime Minister's deadline, the beef ban is 100 per cent. still in place is a terrible indictment of the Government's record?

What damage does the Minister think the episode has inflicted on our standing in the European Union? What assessment has he made of the damage it has done to our industry, including the thousands of jobs lost and the damage to farmers' livelihoods? Does the Minister accept that all those matters have been aggravated by six months of vacillation? May I also remind the Minister that throughout those months the Labour party urged him to meet the conditions of the Florence agreement in full as it was the only current mechanism on the table to enable the ban on the export of British beef and beef products to be lifted?

Does the Minister realise that he has completely failed to justify why the Government have taken six months to reach this point and that his excuses are extremely unconvincing? May I remind him that the work of Professor Roy Anderson and his colleagues, and the evidence on maternal transmission, mean that, if anything, we could have a more targeted selective slaughter programme, which would enable us to concentrate more effectively on the cows more likely to go down with BSE? That evidence certainly did not justify the Government's decision to shelve the Florence agreement.

May I remind the Minister of the recommendations made in 1989 by the Tyrrell committee for random testing of the brains of cattle that go through our slaughterhouses? That scientific recommendation was never implemented by the Government. Does the Minister agree that there is a strong case for examining the brains

[Dr. Gavin Strang]

of cattle slaughtered under the selective programme to see if we can judge what proportion of animals has been infected by the BSE agent at detectable levels?

The Minister has used as one of his excuses the fact that we did not have the slaughterhouse capacity to implement the selective slaughter programme, and other hon. Members may have observations on that. Has he used these six months to identify the animals that are to be slaughtered under the programme? Is it correct to conclude from the Minister's statement—certainly it was the impression given—that the Government have not identified the cattle targeted under the slaughter programme? Does that not mean an unnecessary and additional delay in implementation?

Does the Minister recall that his other reason for the delay was that the EU would not lift the ban, even if we met our side of the Florence agreement? Apparently, the best that the Prime Minister could get at Dublin when he raised this matter was that decisions would be taken on the basis of science. Hon. Members who heard the Minister say at lunchtime that he would be hard put to make a scientific case for the selective slaughter programme may not regard that as a convincing statement. Surely the Minister can tell us that if we implement our side of the Florence agreement, we can look forward to a rapid lifting of the ban of exports of British beef and beef products. When will he give us a timetable? We are entitled to that this afternoon. Does the Minister appreciate that, yet again, his total mishandling of the BSE crisis has meant that enormous, additional and unnecessary damage has been inflicted on our economy? As far as the farmers, the beef industry and the consumers are concerned, enough is enough.

Mr. Hogg: I think that it is the sense of the House that it would have been more gracious if the hon. Gentleman had welcomed the statement. I am bound to say that his criticisms would have been more plausible had he not in the early stage of the crisis justified the imposition of the ban by the European member states.

On the substantive points of the hon. Gentleman's question—rather than the bluster—I agree that the imposition of the ban has caused considerable damage to British agriculture, beef producers and related industries, and it is in recognition of that fact that the Government have committed more than £3 billion in assistance. I do not for one moment suppose that the Labour party would have done that.

As regards the publication of Professor Anderson's report in *Nature*, it was right that we should pause on the range of options there described to see, for example, if member states could be persuaded that one of the other options described was more appropriate, cost-effective and efficient than that described in the Florence agreement. We have been unable to persuade them of that.

On the question of the relationship between the selective cull and the over-30-months scheme, we have always made it plain that it would be highly desirable to complete, or substantially complete, the over-30-months scheme before we move on to the accelerated cull. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made plain, we have now slaughtered more than 1 million beasts under the over-30-months scheme, a logistical exercise of enormous complexity.

On the question whether we have started to trace cattle on farms, the answer is that we have not—for this good reason. Had we identified the animals in question, those animals would have been treated as having no economic value. Clearly, it would have been wrong to do that until such time as we had decided to embark upon the selective cull, as I have described to the House. On the question of justification, the truth is that BSE will die out in the national herd in 2001. The cull itself will reinforce neither public nor animal safety, and its real justification is that, unless we do it, we will not get progress on lifting the ban. That is a political fact, not a scientific one.

As to the timetable, I will say what I have said on many occasions in the past. We will not secure a timetable, and I never pretended that we would. The Florence agreement provides a framework for a step-by-step process that will incrementally lead to a lifting of the ban.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): The large sum of compensation—more than £3 billion to the farming and meat processing industries—has been warmly received and has gone a long way towards helping those who have been hurt financially. Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure me on one particular point in relation to the Florence agreement, which was a United Kingdom agreement? Will any move towards the certified herd scheme—which I hope will be implemented as quickly as possible—be on a United Kingdom basis, and not country by country?

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his kind remarks, and very few people know more about this subject than him. The application and criteria for certified herds will be expressed in United Kingdom-wide terms.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Is the Minister now prepared to state unequivocally that he can reiterate the Prime Minister's promise—that control over the timetable is now in the hands of the Government? In the light of what he has said this afternoon, is he prepared to look again at the time scale for the completion of the accelerated cull? He tells us that it will take six months. As 1 million cattle have been destroyed in a six-month period, surely the basic arithmetic suggests that the process could be completed more speedily. Finally, paragraph 24 of the consultation paper suggests that the way in which the slaughter will be allocated to abattoirs will be similar to that under the 30-months scheme. Is he aware of the real concerns about the way in which a small number of abattoirs have profiteered and made a killing from the scheme? The new scheme must be put out to competitive tender.

Mr. Hogg: I can only assume that the hon. Gentleman either has not read or has misunderstood the Florence agreement, which never provided for a timetable. It provided for a process—*[Interruption.]* I am referring the hon. Member for North Cornwall—who is fluffing about—to the Florence agreement, which I suggest he reads. What he will see if he reads it, and is capable of understanding it, is a process whereby the British Government will put documents to the Commission, who will then place those documents before the Standing Veterinary Committee and other expert committees where

the issue will be discussed. The response that we receive is in the hands of the European Commission and the member states.

We will negotiate vigorously along the lines that I have set out—namely, that the application in respect of certified herds is but a first step and will be expressed in UK-wide terms. The scheme will take some time in parts of Great Britain, simply because the numbers are substantial and the tracing process complicated. It is different in Northern Ireland—where tracing can be done rapidly—and, for that matter, in Scotland. In England, it will be a lengthy process and six months is not an unrealistic assessment.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the process of negotiations—as he describes it—is, in effect, no better than a process of appeasement? In fact, the events of the past six months have played further into the hands of those member states who have said that they will not lift the ban. What indication does he have that the ban will be lifted? Does he regard these talks as negotiations?

Mr. Hogg: What we are doing is proceeding with a process that was agreed in Florence. I do not want the House to be under any misunderstanding. I certainly accept that it will be difficult and slow to achieve a complete lifting of the ban, but I think that we have a reasonable chance of securing a partial lifting of the ban, for example, in respect of the certified herds. We shall then press on, for example, in respect of cattle born after a certain date. However, unless we commit ourselves to implementing the selective cull, we can be certain that there will be no progress of any kind.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): At the bottom of page 2 of his opening statement, the Minister referred to the latest scientific evidence not known at the time of the Florence agreement. What part of the scientific evidence was so crucial as to have altered policy?

Mr. Hogg: The most interesting, but by no means the only, piece of scientific evidence that came to the fore after the Florence agreement was the possibility of maternal transmission.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): The House will be glad to have heard from my right hon. and learned Friend that we are now to go ahead with the selective cull, which should enable us to meet the Florence conditions. Can he be more specific about the timetable? He has said that the process will be difficult and slow, but what does that mean? How difficult and how slow? During his discussions in Dublin, was he given any indication by his fellow Agriculture Ministers that some other scientific reasons may be dreamed up in order to frustrate our return to exporting beef?

Mr. Hogg: I shall be talking to Agriculture Ministers tomorrow and after that I may be in a slightly better position to respond to my hon. Friend's questions than I am now.

It is important that we do not set out a false prospectus. What we have achieved at Florence is a process that is capable, given good will, of leading step by step to a lifting of the ban. It will take time, however, and there are a variety of reasons why member states will be reluctant to agree—most notably the internal pressure that they face from their farmers, consumers and those who are involved in the collapse in their markets for beef consumption. It is therefore unwise to talk in terms of timetables, but I can say that we will put our formal proposals—the working document—on the certified herds to the Commission at about the end of January next year. The Commission will then—I hope shortly thereafter—put the proposals to the Standing Veterinary Committee and the other veterinary committees. We need some delay before going to the Commission because there is a consultation process in respect of the certified herds which concludes on 17 January. It is desirable that we should complete that process before putting our firm proposals to the Commission.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman acknowledge the very real difficulties of beef farmers in north-east Wales? Can he guarantee my constituents easy access to abattoirs as they try to cope with the problem? Finally, will he consider an invitation from me to visit Pwll farm in Treuddyn, where Mr. Idris Roberts, who is the leader of Flintshire National Farmers Union, could give him a reasonable and helpful tutorial on these matters?

Mr. Hogg: That is a kind offer—the only problem is that I have no departmental responsibility for agriculture in Wales and, therefore, I might trespass on the ground of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

There are two different points relating to abattoirs and the availability of spaces within them. In respect of slaughtering under the accelerated cull, I do not anticipate any difficulty with finding ready slots for slaughtering cattle under that scheme. In respect of the over-30-months scheme, there were delays and I shall not try to pretend otherwise. I am glad to say that the backlog has now been cleared and I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's constituents should be having any current difficulty with finding slots for the slaughter of their beasts. If I am wrong on that point, the hon. Gentleman should talk to my hon. Friend the Minister of State and we shall see what we can do to help.

Sir Jim Spicer (West Dorset): Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept the thanks of the farming community, both in my constituency and in the west country as a whole, for the way in which the herculean task of dealing with more than 1 million cattle so far has been tackled and especially for achieving a figure of more than 60,000 in the past few weeks? Does he agree that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) does not understand the position that we were in a few months ago? If he had been a west country farmer, facing the prospect of 102 cattle still caught in the backlog of the 30-months cull, the last thing he would have wanted would have been a Minister coming forward with a scheme like this. We had to get the backlog cleared before moving on.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend also agree that the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) misses the point when he asks why we cannot act quickly? All my constituents want some flexibility, because they are

[Sir Jim Spicer]

coming up to the end of the quota year. In the interests of the farming community, we must have flexibility in the way in which we deal with this problem.

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind observations. I am well aware, from a spirited meeting that I attended in the west country, of the concern felt by farmers in my hon. Friend's constituency and elsewhere about the backlog. I am glad that we have been able to clear the backlog. My hon. Friend is right to say that by clearing the backlog we have brought about a change in sentiment within the farming industry. Previously, it was hostile to the cull. I believe that farmers, generally speaking, now want us to carry out the cull.

On the question of flexibility, my hon. Friend is again right to say that that is important. In those cases where we are contemplating culling a substantial number of cattle from a single herd, we shall try to do it in at least two tranches.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Many hon. Members are hoping to catch my eye, so briefer questions and brief answers would be welcome and helpful.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): Is the computerised tracing scheme that the Minister is setting up in Great Britain comparable with the one that already exists in Northern Ireland? Will he explain how his statement today will impact on the beef industry in Northern Ireland where, I believe, most herds will qualify almost immediately for the certified herd scheme? Will he also explain the implications for the flagged holdings in Northern Ireland, specifically suckler herds? Will he give an undertaking that arrangements for the cull will be better than those for the 30-months scheme?

Mr. Hogg: I imagine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you will want me to concentrate on what I judge to be the core of the hon. Gentleman's question, which is the significance of the statement to Northern Ireland.

The hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity very soon to study the discussion document or consultation paper on certified herds and he will see two matters of particular relevance to Northern Ireland. First, the criteria to determine which animals are capable of being classified as certified herds will be met by many herds and cattle in Northern Ireland. Secondly, when it comes to proving eligibility—that will be an absolutely essential part of the scheme—Northern Ireland is extremely well placed, by reason of its computer-based system, to achieve that. I cannot think of any part of the United Kingdom that is better placed to meet the criteria than is Northern Ireland and I can think of no part of the United Kingdom that is likely to make more rapid progress in satisfying the criteria than is Northern Ireland.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My right hon. and learned Friend has just been talking about Northern Ireland. I understand that the selective cull there could go through very quickly. If so, we would then discover our European partners' bona fides in respect of lifting the ban. Is it not a question of hastening the process in Northern Ireland and then thinking again about whether we should pursue the cull more widely?

Mr. Hogg: I would not commend that course of action to my hon. Friend, for the following reason. He will remember that, at the end of my statement, I said that, in my view, a commitment to the selective cull is an essential, indispensable precondition to making any progress. I do not think that we would secure any progress if the cull to which we committed ourselves was partial or regional. Consequently, the cull that we are proposing is UK-wide and will be carried out UK-wide. The application regarding certified herds is couched in UK-wide terms, but the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) and my hon. Friend will have heard what I just said about Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is not it clear that such a scheme, especially for England, would be extremely difficult and time-consuming to impose? There is no base line, and there are certainly no existing arrangements that would meet the conditions that are found specifically in Northern Ireland, and also in Scotland, at present.

Does the Minister accept that he has demonstrated this afternoon that European countries with large agricultural industries have no intention of helping us while they are supplying our markets and have no intention of listening to anything from the scatter-gun approach that he suggests today?

Mr. Hogg: What the hon. Lady is saying is something like this: that the certified herd scheme will not be applicable to very many herds in England, and she has a point. There are at least three areas, however, on which she may not have fully focused. The first is the beef assurance scheme. Cattle which fall within the beef assurance scheme will, by definition, qualify under the certified herd scheme, provided that at the material date they are not more than 30 months of age. Secondly, we have had cattle passports as from 1 July—about 713,000 have been issued thus far—and that is a good basis for matching cattle with our confirmed case computer base. Moreover, in respect of some herds in which cattle have never moved from the natal herd, we shall be able to satisfy the eligibility criteria, but it will be easier in Northern Ireland than it is in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that there will be considerable disappointment that we are going ahead with the selective cull without obtaining firm and copper-bottomed guarantees as to when the export ban will be lifted? Many of us do not trust our European friends and we believe that they will keep the ban going for year after year. What happens if we complete the cull and they still refuse to lift the ban? May I suggest that the only way in which we shall get any success is to tell them that, if they do not lift our ban after we have spent £3.2 billion, we shall ban their beef from being imported into this country?

Mr. Hogg: I understand my hon. Friend's position, but it has always been so. The Florence agreement did not

provide for a timetable. Perhaps I may put the argument the other way round: if we do not commit ourselves to a selective cull, there will certainly be no progress.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): The Minister talked about the cattle passport scheme, and I believe he mentioned the figure of 713,000 passports. Does that scheme meet in every respect the provisions in the Florence arrangement, which talks about an animal identification scheme? Does it meet the provisions throughout the United Kingdom or is it more likely to meet them in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman has given me an opportunity to correct one error that I made. I said 713,000; I should have said 751,000, and I apologise.

The cattle passport scheme does meet the requirements of Florence. We shall improve it. As the hon. Gentleman may know, on 10 December I published a consultation document on a computer-based traceability system, which will be an enhancement on the paper-based system and will be run in a way that is compatible with proposals made by the European Commission. On the narrow question that the hon. Gentleman asked, namely, is our identification now up to scratch, the answer is yes, and it is better than is to be found in most European states.

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): Am I right in thinking that, in last month's Opposition day debate on BSE, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) gave a strong commitment to supporting the cull? Has my right hon. and learned Friend had a renewal of that commitment?

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend makes a fair point, which is one of the reasons why I said that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) was less than gracious in his response to my statement. The hon. Gentleman will remember the intervention that I made in his winding-up speech, when he gave a categorical commitment to support the selective cull.

Dr. Strang *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hogg: I see he is nodding. That is good of him, but I am bound to say that we have got it down and will keep it in evidence against him.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): The Minister has made it clear that he does not have European agreement to the further slaughter. How confident is he that his fellow Ministers in the European Community will agree with the methodology involved in targeting those specific animals? Are not we now in the worst of all worlds—where we have no European agreement and the Minister does not truly believe in the programme? When the Minister is reduced to doing something that he does not believe in, is not it time that he went and made way for someone who knows what he is doing?

Mr. Hogg: We do have agreement as to the concept that underpinned the figure of 128,000. Those concepts, which were set out in the eradication programme that we submitted, were approved at the time of the Florence agreement. So we have agreement on the point of the three cohorts plus the voluntary cohort. We shall have to form a view on whether there will be an attempt to add to those numbers on account of "maternal transmission" when we have better evidence from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee in spring 1997.

The hon. Gentleman says that I do not agree with the programme. That is not true. I well understand why several hon. Members wish that we could have a timetable. I accept that it is difficult to justify a cull in scientific terms—it will not improve public health—but one must stand back and ask oneself a different question: whether, if we do not have a cull, we shall make progress. In the absence of a selective cull, we shall make no progress, and on that basis I defend it.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): The Minister made it clear that at first there was opposition to the Florence cull. Can he confirm that no opposition came from the Ulster Farmers Union, which backed an immediate culling? He also told the House that Northern Ireland would be in a very favourable position. If that is so, is he prepared immediately to propose to Agriculture Ministers that Northern Ireland should be made a special case? Will he take from the Prime Minister a letter delivered to him by myself and the leader of the SDLP, which made it clear that the German Minister of Agriculture was now of a mind to change his view and support Northern Ireland as a special case?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the farmers of Ulster have always supported a cull, for reasons such as those that underpinned the question asked by the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross). We shall, as expeditiously as we can, go to the European Commission and, through it, the Standing Veterinary Committee and the other experts, with our full working document, which will set out our concept of a certified herd scheme, which will be UK-wide in its application. I do believe, however, for the reasons that I mentioned to the hon. Member for East Londonderry, that Northern Ireland is very well placed to satisfy the eligibility criteria and—even more to the point—to have that satisfaction of the criteria established positively, so that the European Union can be satisfied that it is valid.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): First, if we can have a cattle passport scheme, when can we have a passport scheme for pets? Secondly, what is the total cost of the BSE eradication scheme to date, including compensation, transport, slaughter, rendering and incineration?

Mr. Hogg: On the first question, the hon. Gentleman must wait on events. On the second question, the overall cost committed—not money spent, but committed over the relevant periods set out in the documents—is slightly more than £3 billion.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): May I endorse the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir J. Spicer), and the broad thrust of his question? What my farmers require is a greater degree of certainty. Can my right hon. and learned Friend tell me when the selective cull will come into effect? I do not want to know the end date; I want to know when it will begin. Can my right hon. and learned Friend also tell me the operative date for deciding the market value of any particular beast?

Mr. Hogg: We intend valuation to be taken as at the day of valuation, which will give a degree of certainty.

[Mr. Hogg]

As my hon. and learned Friend will see in the consultation document, however, we have contemplated the possibility of some other date, and if people want to argue in favour of some other date we shall manifestly take their representations into account.

When the culling will start rather depends on whether the House wants to debate the compensation order. I anticipate that it may want to do so, but I do not suppose that that will happen until the latter part of January. We cannot slaughter until we have debated the order, if that is the will of the House, and get approval if we do so; but we might be in a position to start the slaughter in February or early March.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I welcomed the rather belated statement about the selective cull, but has the Minister learnt any lessons from the over-30-months scheme, which involved huge backlogs in parts of north Wales? The Minister might have to look again at the overall structure of the scheme that he is introducing. I was very disturbed by his earlier comment that some parts of the United Kingdom would make more rapid progress than others: that does not sound to me like uniformity.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman has made a number of points. The reference to rapid progress was actually a reference to the fact that Northern Ireland is particularly well placed to satisfy the criteria, and also to prove that the criteria have been satisfied. As for the accelerated cull programme, I do not anticipate any difficulty in ensuring rapid slaughter. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, we raised the slaughter capacity in regard to the over-30-months scheme to 60,000 a week. It has now plummeted, and there is now a good deal of capacity to enable us to carry out that slaughter.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): My right hon. and learned Friend has been candid enough to say on a number of occasions that there is no scientific justification for the extended cull, but that it is necessary to get the ban lifted. Will he elaborate for a moment or two on the logic of saying that it is better to carry out the cull and then hope that our so-called partners will take mercy on us than simply to say, "If we do this, will you lift your ban?"? Would our partners not be more likely to take notice of our position if we said, "We will co-operate in this way if you give us an assurance that you will lift the ban; alternatively, we will consider measures of our own, such as insisting that imports of foreign beef are subjected to the same stringent health conditions as our own beef"? Would not a package of that sort be more likely to achieve the result towards which my right hon. and learned Friend has been working for so long?

Mr. Hogg: I recognise that my hon. Friend has a great deal of experience of negotiation. I have been engaged in this particular business for six or seven months, and I owe it to the House to give the best opinion that I can give on how we are likely to make progress most effectively.

I have taken into account, and explored, possibilities such as those outlined by my hon. Friend, and have finally reached the clear conclusion that, unless we give this commitment to the selective cull, we shall not make any progress of any kind. That is the advice that I give the House, but it is, of course, for the House to make its own judgment.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): The Minister already knows that we have a certified 97 per cent. herd traceability in Northern Ireland. He also knows that the over-30-months cull was completed this week, and that the accelerated cull could be completed in a matter of weeks. That means that Northern Ireland has fulfilled all the Florence requirements, or will certainly have done so by the middle of January.

May I ask the Minister to clarify his earlier answers? Does that mean that, because it has qualified under all those headings, the ban will be lifted from Northern Irish beef? If not, why not? Is the Minister aware that Commissioner Fischler and the chairman of the Committee of Agriculture Ministers are simply waiting for the British Government to make that request to them, and will he make that request?

Mr. Hogg: I should be a little cautious about interpreting exactly what the position is, but let me make the situation plain once more. The application in respect of certified herds will be UK-wide, and I hope that we shall be in a position to put the relevant papers to the Commission at the end of January or the beginning of February. The hon. Gentleman will recall that he himself said that the position in Ulster would not have met all the criteria until the middle of January. We will then engage in discussions with the European Commission and within the Standing Veterinary Committee, but I believe that Northern Ireland will find it relatively easy to meet the criteria, and that it is uniquely well placed to prove that they have been met.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I assure my right hon. and learned Friend that his announcement will be greeted warmly by farmers in Northumberland, who will see it as the start of a long process rather than an end in itself. Today is not the occasion on which to threaten our European partners with what might happen in the future.

May I ask a technical question? If there is a disagreement about value, will an appeal mechanism be available to farmers?

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has considerable knowledge of these matters.

There are three possible valuation methods. First, the farmer agrees to the appointment of a valuer by the Ministry, and he will fix the valuation. Secondly, a valuer will be appointed by the farmer and the Ministry, allowing the possibility of an agreed valuation. Failing that, the chairman of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors can appoint a valuer, and that valuation is agreed to be final. To that extent there is an appeal mechanism, but it is by way of reference to an independent valuer appointed by the chairman of the RICS.

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): We still need a clear answer from the Minister about the British Government's position in relation to Northern Ireland. He will know that about 1,700 cattle must be slaughtered there to meet the Florence criteria. If, after that has been achieved, the European Commission acknowledges—whether to the

Select Committee, which is now taking an interest in the matter, or to any other reputable organisation, which I hope includes the British Government—that Northern Ireland has met the criteria, will the British Government then ask for the ban on Northern Ireland's beef to be lifted? That is what we need to know.

Mr. Hogg: I think that the hon. Gentleman slightly misunderstands the process. Let me begin by establishing a small point of fact. The number of cattle to be slaughtered under the accelerated cull scheme in Northern Ireland is now substantially less than 1,700; a good many have gone under the over-30-months scheme.

We will come forward with an application to the Commission, and through the Commission to the Standing Veterinary Committee, and thereafter to other expert committees. It is possible that the application will go back to the Council, but I hope that it will not. That will be in respect of certified herds UK-wide. We must then see what the response is. I hope that we shall be able to secure a lifting of the ban that is not confined to Northern Ireland—that we shall be able to satisfy the Commission that there are herds in Scotland, for example, that may meet the criteria as the Commission would want, and also, perhaps, in England and Wales. It will be a hard negotiation, but I will not stand artificially in the way of progress. I want to see progress.

Sir Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): Will my right hon. and learned Friend ensure that some of the farmers who have been especially hard hit by the cull will receive extra-generous compensation for the disruption that they will obviously suffer?

Mr. Hogg: We have already made available to producers a narrow line of aid of the order of £263 million or £264 million. Some £50 million from the October Council is still undetermined and I anticipate a high degree of national discretion about how that money is spent, albeit it is EU money.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The Minister told the House that both the slaughter and disposal of the 1 million cattle were complete. How many cattle have been disposed of by incineration and how many have been disposed of by landfill and where are they? Is it right that several thousand tonnes of cattle are still in storage throughout the country awaiting disposal?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Lady is right. We have slaughtered about 1,080,000 under the over-30-months scheme and have not yet been able to dispose of all the carcases. The only way in which we could increase the throughput to 60,000 a week was to substantially increase the cold storage capacity. We have been taking out the specified bovine material and disposing of it immediately and putting the rest of the carcases into cold storage to await the opportunity to render and dispose of them in the appropriate way.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): If the Minister chooses any additional abattoirs to deal with the selective cull will he ensure that a transparent procedure is implemented for choosing them? There is a great deal of grievance in the industry because abattoir owners believe that those which were selected for the 30-months-scheme were chosen under a system of secrecy.

Mr. Hogg: It is indeed desirable to have greater transparency and we shall therefore proceed to an open tender system in the new year.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is not it important for the House to know that the animal traceability system and the animal identification scheme which exist in Northern Ireland and which will facilitate an early raising of the ban there are precisely those that the Government rejected in 1990 when they were recommended by the Select Committee on Agriculture? Such a scheme was also rejected when it was proposed in amendments to the Bill that led to the Agriculture Act 1993 and in a recommendation in 1995 by the Select Committee on Agriculture. If the Northern Ireland scheme had been implemented throughout the kingdom over the six years that the Opposition have been demanding it, we would not be in the mess that we are in today.

Mr. Hogg: One must always take into account proportionality and the scientific opinion of the time. In the computer-based system that we are discussing we envisage about 40 million movements being recorded. That is hugely in excess of what is recorded on the Northern Ireland computer base and it would require positive justification. With the advantage of hindsight, one can construct a case, but taking account of the scientific judgment at the time the decisions that were taken were correct.

NEW MEMBER

The following Member took and subscribed the Oath:

Jeffrey Ennis Esq., for Barnsley, East.

Point of Order

5.24 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I draw to your attention pages 121, 122 and 129 of "Erskine May", which advise on what constitutes contempt of the House in respect of remarks made or printed outside the House? My complaint relates to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), whom I have advised of the point of order. On Saturday 14 December—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I think that I have got the hon. Gentleman's message. Such matters must be raised privately with Madam Speaker.

Fisheries

[Relevant documents: European Community Documents Nos. 9999/96 establishing a Community system for fisheries and aquaculture, 11016/96 on monitoring Community conservation and management measures applicable to third country fishing vessels, 11164/94 relating to guide prices for fishery products in 1997, 11171/96 relating to third country fisheries agreements, and the unnumbered Explanatory Memoranda submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 9 December 1996 relating to Community catch possibilities in NAFO waters for 1997, and on 9 December 1996 relating to reciprocal access and 1997 quotas with Norway.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

5.25 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Tony Baldry): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Document COM(96)641 relating to the fixing of total allowable catches for 1997 and certain conditions under which they may be fished; and supports the Government's intention to negotiate the best possible fishing opportunities for British fishermen consistent with scientific advice and the need to sustain the stocks for the benefit of future generations of fishermen.

Technically, this is a scrutiny debate on proposals to be discussed and decided at the Fisheries Council of Ministers on Thursday and Friday where, among other things, the total allowable catches of the main stocks of fish will be agreed for the forthcoming year.

I shall refer, first, to the practical difficulties we all have in preparing for this debate. As hon. Members know, the availability of papers for the debate is always difficult. It reflects the pressure of events and the need for the latest scientific advice to be available before the Commission makes its proposals and starts negotiations, not just with the European Union, but with third countries such as Norway. I have taken the matter up with the Fisheries Commissioner and I assure the House that I have done everything humanly possible to ensure that papers are available in as much time as possible. I wrote on 13 December to the Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation to provide the very latest information on the outcome of the negotiations with Norway, and copies of the letter were made available in the Vote Office.

By custom, this debate has become an annual opportunity more generally to review the state and prospects of the United Kingdom's fishing industry. It is always right to recall what a hazardous activity fishing can be. In spite of all the technological advances, many fishermen lose their lives at sea as they seek to make their living. In this, the centenary year of the Royal National Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen, we must not forget the realities of the industry.

Undoubtedly, the UK fishing industry faces many challenges. It is a diverse industry, ranging from large refrigerated trawlers fishing in distant waters and spending months at sea, to small coastal trawlers that spend no more than a day away from port. Often it seems that we are beset only by bad news about fishing, but it

would be a mistake to underestimate the achievements of UK fishermen and the UK fishing industry or the investment that the industry is making in its own future.

When I visited Peterhead recently, fishermen there made it clear to me that licences—simply the opportunity to catch fish—were being sold for up to £1 million. Recent press reports have commented that the Shetland island of Whalsay alone has at least 20 millionaire fishermen who own the lion's share of the island's £16 million fishing fleet. Just about a week ago, the newest trawler from Whalsay, the 211 ft Zephyr, which is capable of carrying 16,000 tonnes of fish, set out on her maiden voyage. That new boat is estimated to have cost £9 million and it is the latest of seven ships being built for Shetland fishermen. That has been made possible by increased incomes from fishing. Indeed, the value of fish landed in the UK in the first nine months of this year has increased by some 6 per cent. on last year and that increase in value is reflected in improved turnovers at our main fish markets.

I have recently visited fish markets such as Peterhead, Plymouth and Billingsgate, all of which have reported to me substantially increased turnover and increased profits. At Plymouth, for example, sales through the market are expected to have increased from just under £1.5 million in 1994 to nearly £5 million in 1996. In part, that improvement reflects the investment that is being made, often with the help of Government marketing grants. In total, about £63 million has been paid to the industry from public and Community funds in the past three years, with a further £68 million under other EU structural grant measures. Those improvements also reflect, however, increasing consumption and improved value of catches. According to the national food survey published just a few days ago, fish consumption in the UK in the past three years is as high as it has been for more than 20 years. It is important, therefore, to put the UK fishing industry's prospects into proper context.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am sure that the Minister would concede that fishermen at Peterhead and elsewhere are concerned about the flags of convenience issue. The President of the Board of Trade said that, at the intergovernmental conference, the 48-hour directive was

"the issue that matters to the Government and we intend to insist upon it."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 163.]

If the Government were to secure agreement on quota hopping—treaty changes to resolve the flags of convenience issue—would they not then agree to the changes, unless and until the 48-hour directive was also agreed? Is it more important to save the fishing industry or to stop working people taking holidays?

Mr. Baldry: One of the reasons I am glad I went to Peterhead is that it reminded me just how much I dislike the Scottish National party. It is so disingenuous; it proclaims that the only future for an independent Scotland is in the European Union, within which it would sign up lock, stock and barrel to the common fisheries policy. I will talk about quota hoppers in some detail, and make clear yesterday's comments by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary, who said that it is important that we resolve at the intergovernmental conference the issue both of the 48-hour week and of quota hoppers. If the hon. Gentleman bides his time, he will hear me deal with those issues in terms.

Not all parts or sectors of the UK fishing industry are doing so well. Some ports are under pressure and the industry overall faces substantial challenges, not least the availability of fish to catch.

I know that Fleetwood has experienced a considerable reduction in its fleet, so it is important for it to be able to attract additional throughput of fish. I am sure that my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, North (Mr. Elletson), for Wyre (Mr. Mans) and for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett–Bowman) will have shared my pleasure at the grants that I was able to announce recently to aid facilities for packing and processing there, which will, I hope, help sustain activity at Fleetwood.

Dame Elaine Kellett–Bowman (Lancaster): I do not think that my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) is here for the moment, but following the announcement of that grant, morale in Fleetwood has improved.

Mr. Baldry: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's confirmation of that and that Fleetwood is beginning to see that, with our help, there is a clear future for the port.

Equally, there have been massive changes in the port of Grimsby as access to fish stocks has fallen, but there are some positive signs. During the past year, I have been pleased to participate in the opening of the new Grimsby harbour facilities, in the opening of a new fish processing factory and in the launch of a vessel. Those are just some of the signs of investment there and I understand that throughput is rising.

In addition, I have been able to announce a significant number of grants for investment in fish processing and linked facilities in Grimsby, all of which, I hope the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) will in due course acknowledge, is reason for optimism for the fisheries infrastructure in Grimsby. It is now, I think, the leading fish processing centre in the Europe, and it would be justified in taking pride in that.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): My hon. Friend has said that he will refer in detail to quota hopping and, subject to early evening constituency engagements, I look forward to hearing those details in some length, which will, I am sure, assist the House, but will he explain the balance of Government policy on these matters? He referred to investment in modern fishing vessels and the high cost of the technology and equipment. Bearing it in mind that British investors buy other non-British boats, that Spanish investors buy British boats, that Dutch investors buy British, that British buy Dutch, that Dutch buy German, that German buy French, and that investors in Scotland buy English boats in accordance with their rights under the treaty of Rome and the developing single market, is it not wrong for the Government to highlight quota hopping at the expense of other parameters and to give the impression that they want to restrict the market and, indeed, the free enterprise notion of the single market?

Mr. Baldry: I will deal with quota hoppers, but let me deal with my hon. Friend's point. May I say that I will try to deal with every issue. If I have not, I ask hon. Members to intervene. In all fairness, my hon. Friend is mistaken to this extent. He and I and, I think, every hon.

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Member strongly support the notion of a single market. The UK has done more to promote the single market than any other member state in Europe because we want the EU to be a trading entity. Fishing is the only area of Community activity where there are national quotas, and it makes a lot of sense to ensure that UK fishing quotas can benefit UK fishermen.

Fishing is a hunting activity. Fishing boats are designed to track down and catch as many fish as possible. To ensure sustainable levels of fish for fishermen for years to come, there is always a difficult balance to be struck between enabling the industry to maximise today's catch and ensuring that there are sufficient fish in the sea for years to come. On that issue, Ministers with responsibility for fisheries are inevitably prone to be criticised, both by fishermen for not allowing them to catch as many fish as they should like, and by conservationists for allowing fishermen to catch more fish than they consider to be wise.

In coming to conclusions, we have to have regard to the advice of fisheries scientists, but we also have to give careful attention and consideration to the advice of fishermen themselves as to the strength and sustainability of stocks. After all, it is they who are fishing the waters day by day. They know what they are catching. They know the strength of the stocks and it is their future that is at stake.

In the negotiations at the Fisheries Council this coming Thursday and Friday, my negotiating objectives closely reflect the UK fishing industry's concerns. The House will not be surprised that I have had close and detailed discussions with the UK fishing industry as a whole, stock by stock, on what we shall be seeking to achieve at the forthcoming Council of Ministers meeting. For some key fish stocks, it is proposed that the total allowable catch be increased; for others, the proposal is to maintain the status quo, but there are inevitably some where, on the basis of scientific advice and evidence, it is suggested that, to conserve stocks, catches must be reduced. Where that is so, there is a balance to be struck, taking account of the short-term costs to the industry of quota cuts, and the medium-term benefits that should flow from recovery of stocks.

I pay close attention to the advice of the fishing industry. After all, it is fishermen who gain or lose if the management decisions are wrong. At this week's Council meeting, I shall seek to ensure that the eventual quota for UK fishermen is reasonable and proportionate, having regard to all the facts.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The Minister of State has described his visits to various ports in England and to Peterhead. I do not know whether he has been to west Scotland recently but, if he has, or if he talks to the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, he will know the concern about the west Scotland haddock quota. Will the Minister of State press for a substantial increase in that quota? Fishermen should have told him that their view is that the reduction would be detrimental to fishing in west Scotland.

Mr. Baldry: I have not been to west Scotland. I have been to Macduff, whence many fishermen fish off the west of Scotland. They have brought me up to date with the concerns. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that west Scotland haddock is high on our list of priorities for improvement at the forthcoming Council meeting. I am aware, as is my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, of the importance of input on those issues.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Bearing it in mind that there is no longer any swap between the Dutch allowances and those of the south-west and the North sea, will my hon. Friend say something about area VIIe and Dover sole, and whether there could be increases for west country fishermen in VIIe and no decline for fishermen in VIIf or VIIg?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend will not be surprised to hear that, when I met representatives of the UK fishing industry to discuss the issue, those from the south-west expressed concern about that particular stock. I made it clear that it is one of our negotiating objectives to improve the situation. We are the main beneficiaries of that stock. We believe that there should be some reasonable improvement on what the Commission has proposed, and I will be trying to achieve that. It is a very valuable stock for the industry in the south-west.

I have no doubt that there will be some tough negotiations in Brussels this coming Thursday and Friday, but my colleagues who have responsibility for fisheries matters in the Scottish Office and the Northern Ireland Office and I are agreed and well focused on the stocks of importance to the United Kingdom in respect of which we want improvement. I am determined that we will achieve substantial improvements on the Commission's proposals.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Baldry: I will deal with Northern Ireland in a moment. I promise that I will not miss out anybody. Hon. Members can rest assured that there is not a Member or a port with a fishing interest that will be left out of the debate tonight. I promise hon. Members that it will be like a gazetteer of the United Kingdom.

At this point, perhaps I can assure my hon. Friends the Members for Waveney (Mr. Porter) and for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) that I have listened carefully to the views of fishermen from Lowestoft and elsewhere along the east coast and that I appreciate their concern about the level of the plaice quota in the North sea. With the prospect of a quota little different from this year, I can say now that I do not envisage carrying out a North sea plaice swap at the Council. That meets the concerns of those who depend on the North sea plaice and ensures an approach consistent with last year. That was fairly acknowledged by my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen). Of course, what I will do for the south-west—as I did last year—is seek further international swaps during the year which will be of benefit to it.

One issue that is always difficult—and this may relate to what the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) wants to say—and causes concern at the Council is whether to invoke the Hague preference. When the system of national quotas was established, that convention was introduced, to give the UK and Ireland a prior claim

to certain stocks. Until recently, we have been overall beneficiaries of that convention, especially in Scotland. We are now no longer beneficiaries overall.

The immediate difficulty arises when the Republic of Ireland invokes its Hague preference in the Irish sea, largely at the expense of the fishing industry in Northern Ireland. In response to that, I shall want to use international quota swaps to increase our quotas in the Irish sea for the direct benefit of the Northern Irish fishing industry. I shall want, so far as is possible, to mitigate the immediate disadvantages to the Northern Irish industry which result from the Hague preference.

Beyond that, we need to consider whether having the Hague preference is still of benefit to the UK. I have agreed with the UK fishing industry as a whole that the Hague preference is an issue which it would be sensible for us to revisit calmly and in some detail in the new year, involving the whole of the industry. That has been agreed as a sensible way forward by everyone concerned, including the industries in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I agree with what the Minister said about getting rid of the Hague preference. However, it does not extend to Grimsby. For some reason, the definition of north Britain ends at Flamborough head.

If the Minister is to provide compensation to Northern Ireland for the absence of the Hague preference for its ports and fishermen, the same should apply to the west-coast fisheries that do not benefit from the Hague preference either.

Mr. Baldry: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support of the approach I am taking. However, there is a slight misunderstanding. It is not simply a question of the absence of the Hague preference—Northern Ireland loses fish because the Republic invokes the Hague preference. The areas in the North sea where the hon. Gentleman's fleets fish do not lose fish through the invocation of Hague preference. That is the difference.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am sure that the Minister is aware that Northern Irish fishermen are angry because, under the Hague preference, they are not permitted to take fish out of the water, yet part of their quota can be taken out of the water by the Irish Republic. That is unacceptable to them. They feel that the Hague preference must be renegotiated.

Is the Minister aware that there is an abundance of haddock in the Irish sea? In fact, the scientists in Europe told us at a meeting in Brussels that they did not understand why there was so much haddock. They thought it was so scarce that it should not be fished. The same is true of herring and nephrops. Why cannot the quota for Northern Ireland fishermen be left the same when there is such an abundance of fish in the Irish sea?

Mr. Baldry: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, he will know that I was in Northern Ireland the other day talking to the industry. I fully appreciate its concerns about the invocation of the Hague preference. Of course, it is the Republic of Ireland that invokes it. The representatives of the UK and I have agreed that it is now time to reconsider. Overall, the UK no longer benefits from the Hague preference. Therefore, it must be time to revisit it.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman once, and I do not intend to do so again. I can anticipate his intervention. The representatives of the Scottish industry who were present at the meeting this morning agreed with our approach. They thought it sensible to revisit the issue of the Hague preference calmly and coolly in the new year.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it be misleading the House for a Minister to suggest that he has the agreement of an industry, when in fact all he did was tell its representatives what he was going to do?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): That is not something for the Chair to judge.

Mr. Baldry: I agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I had a meeting with representatives of the industry, at which they had every opportunity to express concerns about the approach that I intend to take. They made it clear to me that they saw that approach as sensible. They agreed that we should revisit the issue of the Hague preference calmly and sensibly in the new year.

I want to deal with a point raised by the hon. Member for North Antrim—the question of haddock. As we all know, the Republic of Ireland tends, for a number of reasons, to talk down stocks in the Irish sea. My approach will be based on best science, having regard to what is sensible for and in the best interests of the Northern Ireland fishing industry. We need to ensure that the quotas available for the Northern Irish industry are based on best science and what is in the industry's interests, not on the interests of any other member of the Community. That will be my approach, and I hope that hon. Members agree that it is a sensible way forward.

I make it quite clear to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), who is mischief making, that I want to take the matter forward, calmly and collectively, as a UK industry issue, because different parts of the UK have different approaches to the issue, but it is important that they are all involved and that the matter is discussed calmly and coolly.

During the debate last year, there was much comment on the subject of quota hoppers. I think that, by now, everyone is aware of the nature of quota hoppers. The national quotas allocated under the common fisheries policy are intended to provide for the fishermen and fishing communities of member states. Quota hoppers use UK national quotas, yet they are essentially foreign owned, foreign skippered, foreign crewed vessels that never land their catch in the UK and bring no economic benefit to the UK—but in the eyes of the law they are UK fishing boats. It is clearly a crazy situation. Thanks to the persistence of my hon. Friends from the south-west, especially my hon. Friends the Members for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe), for South–East Cornwall (Sir R. Hicks), for South Hams and for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), we have all focused on

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the need to ensure that it cannot be permitted to continue. That is why the Government have tabled treaty changes at the forthcoming intergovernmental conference.

We are seeking enabling powers that would allow us to insist on there being real economic links between vessels that fish our quotas and the coastal communities that depend on them. We want to be able to introduce, as necessary, requirements on national ownership, residency, crewing, port of operation and landings without the risk of successful challenge before the European Court.

I want to ensure that the UK fish quota is available for the benefit of UK fishermen. Everyone now realises that the issue of quota hoppers will not go away, that it has to be resolved, and that we must ensure that the fish that go with the UK's fish quotas are available for UK fishermen. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear at Dublin, the resolution of that issue is a key priority.

Yesterday, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary stated:

"For example, we believe the social chapter should not be introduced by the back door—that is something on which the Prime Minister has made our position very clear; we have to look out for the interests of our fishing communities who have been gravely damaged by the way in which the quota-hopping phenomena have been distorted very much to our disadvantage. These are two clear examples which are fundamental to our objectives in the negotiation . . . We have made it very, very clear. At the end of the day, the intergovernmental conference reaches a successful conclusion when all the member states are content with the outcome. We have indicated we will not be satisfied with an outcome that does not address for example the two points that I have just raised."

I know that the fishing industry knows that we are determined to take effective action on quota hoppers. That is what we intend to do.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend, because his comments are most reassuring. They are particularly reassuring after the Prime Minister's clear statement, today, that, in June, in Amsterdam, he would—in the hopeful event of another Conservative Government—veto a revised treaty if a quota-hopping amendment were not incorporated into it.

Will my hon. Friend clarify one point? The Government's proposed draft protocol to deal with the quota hopping problem was not included in the draft produced by the Irish at Dublin. That proposal, with other proposals from other nations, slipped into the appendix. Is he hopeful that, between now and Amsterdam, that proposal will be incorporated into a revised treaty, as the Government hope and expect?

Mr. Baldry: Absolutely; and I think that no one can be in any doubt that everyone in Europe realises that quota hopping is a problem that must be resolved. When the Spanish Prime Minister recently visited Britain to meet my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, it could not have been lost on anyone—least of all on anyone in Spain—that much of the questioning by journalists was not on long-standing bilateral issues between the United Kingdom and Spain, such as Gibraltar, but on the issue of quota hopping. It is not an issue that will go away, and our colleagues in Europe understand that.

The Prime Minister made it very clear at Dublin that the problem of quota hopping will not disappear and that it must be resolved. Furthermore, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary could not have made any clearer our commitment to resolving the issue than he did yesterday, when he said that we will not be satisfied with an outcome of the intergovernmental conference that does not address that issue. It is quite clear that the fishing industry understands our commitment to resolving the issue.

In the mean time, I am determined to ensure that all fishing vessels in the UK abide by the rules, irrespective of ownership or of place of landing. Earlier today, in response to a written question from my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), I provided a list of all the prosecutions taken by the Ministry this year that resulted in fines of £5,000 or more. Many of those prosecutions concerned foreign vessels. Of those concerning UK vessels, more than half involved quota hoppers. That fact concerns me, and I am sure that it concerns the House. I shall be investigating what can be done to strengthen compliance with the law.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Baldry: Have I given way already to the hon. Gentleman? Yes, I have.

Quota hoppers currently comprise about 20 per cent. of our offshore fleet. I made it clear that we do not intend to contemplate any further compulsory decommissioning or reduction in the UK fishing effort until the entire matter of quota hoppers is satisfactorily resolved.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): My hon. Friend should know that the stand he has taken over the past year—specifically on quota hopping, but also on many other fishing issues—has been greatly appreciated in the south-west. Does he agree that that issue—as valuable as his comments on quota hopping are—is merely an aspect of a far wider problem: the common fisheries policy? In turn, that policy throws into question the entire basis on which we participate in Europe. Does he look forward to a time when the basis on which we conduct our fishing policy is much more in tune with a sensible way in which to do things than with operating a policy that requires him to apply a type of aggressive sticking plaster to deal with problems in a very narrow manner? That action is very worth while, but it is based on a policy that does not work.

Mr. Baldry: I shall deal at some length with the type of reforms that I should like to be made to the fisheries policy, but I should tell my hon. Friend and the House that we would be misleading ourselves if we believed that simply exiting the common fisheries policy would resolve all our problems, because we would still have to negotiate bilateral arrangements with our fellow member states. In recent weeks, for example, many of us have been preoccupied by the dispute between Guernsey and France. Guernsey is not a member of the European Union or of the common fisheries policy, but that does not stop it disputing with France access to waters. That dispute must be resolved bilaterally.

Much of my time is spent attempting to resolve disputes within the UK fishing fleet, which may be between conflicting interests. I shall say more in a moment about the conflict—which my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge will know only too well—in south Devon

between trawlermen and crabbers. As he also knows, in the south-west there are occasionally quite serious disputes between the English fleet and the Scottish fleet.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Baldry: No; I should like to deal with one or two questions at a time.

The idea that simply exiting the common fisheries policy would resolve all our problems is mistaken. However, of course we require substantial reform of the common fisheries policy, and I shall deal with that issue in some detail.

Mr. Mans: Does my hon. Friend agree that bilateral negotiations do not all always work to our advantage, as we saw in the dispute with Iceland? Many years ago, the Iceland Government offered us 64,000 pounds of cod, which was turned down by the then Labour Government, who wanted twice that amount. Ultimately, however, we received nothing at all. That was one of the reasons why the fishing fleet at Fleetwood declined so severely.

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend has made an extremely good point. It would be fair to say that part of the challenge and part of the difficulties currently faced by the UK fishing industry are a consequence of the long-term loss of our distant waters. Negotiations on those distant waters were bilateral.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland) *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) made a fatuous point at the start of this debate.

Mr. Wallace *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Baldry: I shall deal in a moment with the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) about coastal waters.

Mr. Wallace: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Baldry: No, I will not.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister is frit.

Mr. Baldry: No, I am not. The hon. Gentleman's jumping up and down like a schoolboy will not cause me to give way to him. He made a fatuous point at the beginning of this debate. If he wishes to, he can make his own points in his own manner in his own time.

The UK industry has other concerns. Many of my hon. Friends have understandable concerns that the six and 12-mile fishery limits, which restrict access by foreign vessels to waters around the British coast, will form part of the review in 2002. That matter has been a concern particularly for my hon. Friends the Members for Ludlow (Mr. Gill)—who has visited many ports this year—and for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body). We have made it clear that, for us, the six and 12-mile limits are, and will remain, non-negotiable, and that any interference with those limits is unacceptable.

The restrictions on access by foreign fishing vessels within our six and 12-mile limits are an essential derogation from the equal access provisions under the common fisheries policy. We insisted on them when we joined the Community; they were extended unanimously in 1983 and 1992; and we intend to get a definitive establishment of these restrictions as a part of the CFP at the earliest possible opportunity.

I intend that, as soon as possible, we shall seek to secure the agreement of all member states that there will be no relaxation of, and no change to, the six and 12-mile fishery limits in 2002 and that the six and 12-mile limits should be considered permanent features of the CFP.

Going around the fishing ports of the UK, I have detected a considerable sense of alienation among members of the fishing industry at the way in which fishing policy generally emerges. I am convinced that fishermen must have more say in fishing policy. It is for that reason that I have not only sought to have as many meetings as possible with representatives of the fishing industry, but I have ensured that they have much greater contact with fisheries scientists.

Much more needs to be done, however. That is why I have suggested to European colleagues that there needs to be a pattern of regional committees to take forward good fisheries management. That would mean that member states which have fishing quota in particular waters should come together on a regular basis, whether at ministerial or official level. Most important, they must involve their respective fishing industries and fishermen to discuss how those waters can best be managed in the short and long-term interests of fishermen.

I want fishermen to be fully involved with the development and management of the common fisheries policy. We are making our contribution, which is why much closer contacts have been developed over the past year, including ministerial contacts with fishermen. I and the other UK fisheries Ministers have had numerous meetings with fishermen around the coast in order to hear their views first hand and to explain Government policy.

In addition, there have been numerous meetings between the industry and the Government's fisheries scientists to improve fishermen's understanding of the science underlying fisheries management and to give them the opportunity to make their own contribution. We need to do more, and it should be done by creating regional committees of fishermen and officials from different member states to study developments and to feed in advice before decisions are taken. I am glad to say that, at our request, the European Commission has agreed that such a pilot committee should be established. That is good news.

For the longer term, I should want to see what powers could be devolved to such committees based on the perfectly commonsense principles of subsidiarity and decisions being best taken where they are most relevant. I believe that by involving the fishing industry much more in its own future, fisheries management overall will improve considerably.

Our fishing industry has been at the forefront of making suggestions for technical conservation measures to conserve fish stocks and to make fishing more selective

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and reduce discards. We also have to tackle industrial fishing which is why, at the forthcoming Fisheries Council, we are arguing for a limit be to placed on the number of sand-eels that can be caught.

The UK took the initiative on conservation measures in setting up a fisheries conservation group, bringing together fishermen, fisheries scientists and administrators. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland wants to make my speech for me, he is very welcome to do so. In the spirit of Christmas, and to put the hon. Gentleman out of his pain, I happily give way to him.

Mr. Wallace: The tactic worked. The Minister said earlier that there was some link between the Government's policy on quota hopping and resistance to any compulsory further reduction in the UK fleet. Will he clarify precisely what the policy is? In June this year he was talking about trying to assemble a minority block to stop the proposals for multi-annual guidance programme—MAGP—IV but, in October, the Prime Minister talked about not implementing further compulsory cuts. Clearly, a measure could be agreed with Britain opting out, but what is the Minister's position—not to implement or to try to assemble a blocking minority?

Mr. Baldry: We made it clear that we do not intend to contemplate any further reductions in either the UK fishing capacity or effort control until the issue of quota hoppers is resolved.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Answer the question.

Mr. Baldry: I am going to answer the question. We have to bear it in mind that the Council of Ministers has made little, if any, progress with MAGP IV. The Commission's proposals were roundly condemned by all members of the Council of Ministers. Working hard, the presidency proposed a compromise that commanded the support only of Ireland—that is not surprising as Ireland had the presidency—and Luxembourg. No progress was made at the last Council of Ministers meeting. It was agreed to adjourn the matter with a view to further discussions by officials. I understand that there have been two meetings at official level, but they sought merely to restate some basic principles on which many of them were not even agreed. The latest meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives, or COREPER, discussed what would happen if there was no decision on MAGP IV before the end of this year.

As I told representatives of the UK fishing industry, the possibilities are almost endless, and a number of hypothetical situations could arise. The industry and the House may rest assured that, whatever situation arises, we shall fulfil the commitment I made that we shall not be implementing any further reduction in capacity or effort control until the issue of quota hoppers is resolved. However, it is impossible to say exactly what shape that will take as no one can tell when, if or how the Community will come to a decision on MAGP IV.

The United Kingdom took the initiative on conservation measures by setting up a fisheries conservation group. The results of the group's work provided a strong starting point for the UK's contribution to Community discussions on technical conservation. We are now pressing the Community to ensure that fishing gear and practices are managed according to rules that are fair to all, which reduce the catch of unwanted small fish and so help reduce discards and enable stocks to recover.

Disappointingly, the Commission has not taken on board as many of our and the UK industry's suggestions as I should have hoped. In large part, that is because it clearly feels the need to find technical conservation measures which can apply to all Community waters. Of course, these are extremely difficult to find, and again demonstrate the need for sensible regional management. Different waters doubtless require different conservation measures. For conservation measures to be successful, they need to command the support of the industry; and to command its support, we need the involvement of the fishing industry. The UK fishing industry and the Government are very largely at one in our concerns about the Commission proposals on technical conservation, and I shall continue to argue those concerns in detail whenever the need arises.

There is also understandable concern in the fishing industry, particularly among owners of smaller vessels, about the amount of regulation with which they have to cope. I feel strongly that the position of smaller vessels needs to be protected in the interests of deregulation. Vessels under 10 m in length already have a much lighter administrative regime and do not have to complete logbooks. Data on the catches of these vessels are collected in a non-bureaucratic way. Vessels under 18 m in length are exempt from the reporting provisions for western waters, and I shall want smaller vessels to be exempt from the requirements of any satellite monitoring.

More generally, I shall try to ensure that we keep to the absolute minimum the regulatory burden on fishermen. That is something for which we must continue to press. I am grateful to my hon Friends the Members for Basildon (Mr. Amess) and for Castle Point for bringing home to Commissioner Bonino during their recent visit to Brussels the special needs of inshore fishermen.

In recent months, many hon. Members have spoken to me about their concerns for the long-term future of the industry. The very practical problems faced by some fishermen are well illustrated by those in Start bay. My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams approached me about the problems of conflicting interests there. If there are conflicts locally, I hope that they can be resolved locally. If the Devon sea fisheries committee proposes a byelaw, I shall want to be satisfied that it is proportionate and does not simply seek to advance the interests of any one group.

My hon. Friend has also rightly drawn my attention to the concerns about membership of sea fisheries committees. These have an important role in the local management of inshore fisheries, a role which has expanded with their limits being extended from 3 to 6 miles, and with increasing environmental interest. I assure the House that, when new appointments are made to these committees next year, I shall be careful to take account of this changed situation.

With one of the largest fishing fleets in his constituency for a decade or more, my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams, like other hon. Members from the south-west, has impressed on the Government the

problems facing the industry and suggested how they might best be tackled. Not surprisingly, his help has paid dividends, with the Brixham trawlermen landing a larger and more valuable catch in the past couple of years and the shell fishermen on the coastline also benefiting. All the hon. Members with whom I have had meetings on the subject are tireless workers for the industry and for individual fishermen.

Mr. Steen: In return, may I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for the help and support that he has given to my local industry? The fishermen in Brixham and the shell fishermen have been immensely supported and rewarded by his constant attention to their problems. I pay a personal tribute to his support for the industry.

Mr. Baldry: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that comment. All hon. Members, across parties, are concerned to secure the best interests of the United Kingdom fishing industry—in Newlyn, in Brixham, in the Thames estuary, in Skegness, in Northern Ireland or in Scotland.

Another example of local concerns was provided this summer by my hon. Friends the Members for Blackpool, North and for Wyre, who went to considerable lengths to explain the problems facing Fleetwood and the efforts that all those involved were making to restore the fortunes of that key port. I have been greatly impressed by how the industry throughout the United Kingdom is looking ahead and planning for the future. I wish that it were within my gift to convert two fish to 5,000. I have repeatedly made it clear that I am prepared to listen to the industry and to consider how the management of our quotas might be improved. We are now considering proposals from the industry for long-term changes to the quota management system. Of course all fishermen want to catch more.

I know that fishermen in the south-east have experienced major problems as quotas have diminished and have come under pressure from quota hoppers. Many colleagues have pressed for action to assist the non-sector. Concern comes from many parts of the coast and has been voiced by my hon. Friends the Members for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) and for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait), among others. We have taken account, and will continue to take account, of the needs of the non-sector. We have introduced underpinning for the quota allocations made to the under-10 m fleet and to the non-sector. Next year, that is to be extended to the non-sector allocations for North sea plaice, whiting, channel cod and sole. Despite all the difficulties facing us, we have managed to keep open our main inshore fisheries to the under-10 m fleet to the end of this year.

Dr. Spink: My hon. Friend is doing a sterling job on behalf of our fishermen. The under-10 m fleet brings in less than 2 per cent. of this country's white fish take, but it accounts for the majority of boats on the sea. Will my hon. Friend consider removing those boats entirely from regulation? That seems the right way to manage sea fish conservation and the fishing industry. Commissioner Bonino has undertaken to consider the legislative and financial implications. Will my hon. Friend bring the suggestion forward on every possible occasion?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend knows from my visits to Leigh-on-Sea—I have also visited other ports in the Thames estuary and Rye—that I have taken on board the concerns of the non-sector. We have to consider how the non-sector can avoid being squeezed out. Many people earn their living from the non-sector, often in small boats and in difficult circumstances, subjected to the vagaries of the weather. I hope that I have made it clear to those in the non-sector that I fully appreciate their concerns.

I think that there is no disagreement in the House on the fact that the common fisheries policy is not working as it was intended and needs to be reformed. It is over-bureaucratic, it has failed to protect fish stocks sustainably, it is open to abuse and, above all, it is not fair to British fishermen. We are determined to change all that. We have made it clear to the industry how we intend to do that and are taking the issue forward to ensure that the common fisheries policy is, as far as possible, of real benefit to United Kingdom fishermen. We shall shortly issue a response to the report of the CFP review group. We are signalling the key elements that we are aiming for now and in preparation for the 2002 review.

We have made it clear that we totally reject any idea of a single European fishing fleet, managed and policed from Brussels. There are regular suggestions in the media that plans exist to create such a fleet. The present rules of the common fisheries policy place responsibility for managing quotas and vessels on member states. It is also a national responsibility to enforce fisheries regulations in national waters out to 200 miles. We shall reject any proposals that those national responsibilities should be taken away and that there should in any way be a single community fleet, managed and policed from Brussels.

I believe that the fishing industry recognises that much has been achieved this year. The industry and the Government agree on what remains to be done. I recognise that the practical politics of life are such that opposition parties feel it necessary to try to create divisions on the issue. That is a pity, because it would be in the best interests of the fishing industry throughout the UK if the House were, for once, able to send out a united and unanimous endorsement to Europe and elsewhere of what we are seeking to achieve for our fishing industry.

I am determined that the UK fishing industry should have a clear future and a strong future as we go into the 21st century. The fishermen of Britain can be confident that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, my fellow fisheries Ministers and I—indeed, the whole Government—are determined to do all that is necessary to secure the industry's future.

6.15 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"believes that the failure of this Government in its seventeen years of office to tackle the problems facing the fishing industry is an unacceptable threat to the future of fishing communities in England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland; regrets the failure of the United Kingdom Government to implement a decommissioning policy until 1993; recognises that fishing by non-UK vessels against UK quotas is unacceptable to our fishing industry and calls for effective action to tackle quota-hopping; regrets the Government's failure to prevent increased Spanish access to the Irish Box and Western Waters from 1 January 1996; concludes that the United Kingdom Government has not represented effectively in Europe the interests of this country's fishing industry; further recognises that the overriding priority for the Common Fisheries Policy must be the conservation of fish stocks, without which the fishing industry

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cannot survive; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to work in Europe to achieve reforms of the Common Fisheries Policy that ensure the conservation and fair allocation of fish stocks with effective enforcement by all European States".

As the Minister said, this is the major annual fisheries debate. It is an opportunity for the House to pass judgment on the Government's handling of fisheries policy and their treatment of our fishing communities during the year. As usual, it is taking place before the main Fisheries Council meeting at Christmas, rightly giving hon. Members a chance to express their views on the proposals—not least those on total allowable catches and quotas—that will come up before the Council later this week.

I should like to raise several points about the Fisheries Council. My hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) will deal with more issues when he winds up. There are important questions on quotas to be dealt with and it is understandable that hon. Members on both sides should raise detailed points when local fishermen are worried about the effects on them of the proposals.

There is also concern about the effect on Northern Ireland of the Hague preference. We must address that. I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor), who said that he had received a letter from the Government about that. It is right to mention that.

There is no question but that the Northern Ireland fishing communities have had a raw deal compared with those in the Irish Republic under the common fisheries policy. That is indisputable, considering how the amount of fish landed in the different fishing ports has changed from the traditional patterns since implementation of the CFP. However, any alterations made to the arrangements in an attempt to protect and help the fishermen of Northern Ireland—clearly, we strongly support that aim—must not damage other fishing communities in the United Kingdom. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members from Northern Ireland agree.

When the Minister states, as he has to, that the issue will be resolved through international quota swapping, we must ask questions. Presumably, the Republic of Ireland will not give up quota without something in return from the United Kingdom, although the swap may be more complicated than that. We simply put down a marker that any quota swap must be handled with caution because if a quota swap was to the disadvantage of fishing communities in, for example, the south-west of England, that would be a matter of legitimate concern for both sides of the House.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): I welcome the Opposition spokesman's recognition that the Hague preference is a major problem for the County Down fishing industry. This year alone, the current proposals for the United Kingdom—and that is mainly Northern Ireland in this context—under the Hague preference will mean a loss of 800 tonnes of cod, 1,000 tonnes of whiting and 300 tonnes of plaice. We in Northern Ireland want to hear not only what the Government intend to do about this, but what the Opposition would do to tackle the problem.

Dr. Strang: I will certainly come to that point. I am very conscious of some of the other concerns that Northern Ireland fishermen, along with other UK fishermen, have in relation to Government policy.

I accept what the right hon. Member for Strangford says and we are grateful for the information he has given the House. There is no question but that the invocation of the Hague preference by the Republic of Ireland is unacceptable in terms of its impact on the fishing communities in Northern Ireland.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Republic, although it claims its preference, does not always fish it? We then lose out completely. Northern Ireland is not losing out because of arrangements with other fishing fleets round the United Kingdom coast. The argument is with Dublin and with the Hague preference, and it must be faced. The fishermen of Northern Ireland do not want a revision of the preference. They want that part of the Hague preference to be taken away completely so that no Government can say, "We are taking your fish and even though we do not fish them all, you are getting none of them."

Dr. Strang: Again, the House is grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. As he says, the Republic of Ireland seems to have got such a generous quota that its fishermen have not, on many occasions, been able to fish up to the quota. That is what I meant when I said that Northern Ireland fishermen had got a raw deal from the implementation of the policy compared with fishermen in the Republic. I point out to the House that my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe has visited the issue before; this is not a matter in which we have suddenly taken an interest. We recognise that the problem must be addressed.

I come now to a matter which concerns fishermen throughout the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland. The debate is not just about total allowable catches, quotas and the Hague preference, which are important, but about multi-annual guidance programme IV. It is also about the cuts that will be imposed on our fishing fleet. The reality is that there are many communities—I include the fishing communities of Northern Ireland—where decommissioning is not a panacea and is not acceptable because it means selling jobs and the livelihood of future generations of fishermen.

The Minister's reply to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) was inadequate because he raised an important point. The Government have said that they will not implement multi-annual guidance programme IV, whatever is agreed, until the issue of quota hopping is sorted out. We support that point. That should mean that the Government will continue to block any agreement on the multi-annual guidance programme along the lines being advocated by the Commission or the presidency. That is an extremely important point.

Surely to goodness even this Government, whose record on the matter has been disastrous as I shall explain later, will manage to sustain a blocking minority to prevent any agreement on cuts in our fleet, not just at the next Fisheries Council meeting, but at subsequent meetings until we have got past the intergovernmental conference and until we have resolved the problem of quota hopping.

Mr. Baldry: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman listened to what I said in my very full answer to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). I did not use the word "implement". I said that we were not

prepared to contemplate any further reduction in UK fishing capacity or fishing effort until matters were resolved in the IGC.

The hon. Gentleman asked about frustrating the Commission and the presidency and about preventing them from bringing forward proposals. We are, of course, making it clear to our colleagues where we find that the proposals have major shortcomings. No decision has yet been taken and it is unlikely that any decision will be taken this coming week. It is very unlikely that any decision will be taken in the foreseeable future.

All sorts of things may arise because many member states are concerned about the structural funds that go with multi-annual guidance programmes III and IV. They are concerned about whether it may be in the interests of everyone to have a roll-over of MAGP III for a further year. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that whatever may arise, I will protect the UK fishing industry and ensure that we continue with our basic premise—that there will be no further reduction in UK fishing capacity or fishing effort until the whole issue of quota hoppers is resolved. I hope that that is perfectly clear.

Dr. Strang: We have heard the word "contemplate" too often over the years. If the Minister is saying that the Government will block the cuts in our fleet—which will mean cuts in the fleets of other member states—that is fine. However, my simple point is this. Blocking agreement will be a success, but coming back here in January—I gather from what the Minister has said that there is no danger of this—and saying that other Governments have agreed to multi-annual guidance programme IV, but that the British Government are not contemplating it will be a very different state of affairs. From what the Minister has said, I trust that we need not worry about that possibility.

Mr. Steen: Nobody doubts the hon. Gentleman's sincerity. I listened, however, to the Minister's speech which was a tour de force. Does the hon. Gentleman really disagree with specific points or are the Opposition just shadow boxing around various issues? I do not understand so far whether the Opposition really disagree with the Government's policy. If they do not disagree and think that the Government are doing a jolly good job, why are they opposing the Government tonight?

Dr. Strang: This is all very fine, but we cannot just ignore the Government's record. Conservative Members staged a most impressive love-in during the debate; we shall see whether that is sustained during the vote. As I said at the beginning, this is not just a debate about what will be discussed in the Fisheries Council; this is the major annual fisheries debate of the year. The hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) can rest assured that I will come to some of our differences.

There is a serious point which all hon. Members know in their heart of hearts is an extremely important one. The truth is that the decisions in which the Minister will be participating this week will be taken against the background of, I hope, a recognition that we need more effective conservation measures for the stocks that are at risk. There is a legitimate and real concern about what is likely to happen to the fish stocks on which, among others, our fishermen are dependent if effective conservation is not implemented.

I had the pleasure of attending an interesting meeting at the House of Commons organised by the parliamentary and scientific committee; one or two other hon. Members were also there. I heard Professor John Beddington of Imperial college and Mr. Barry Deas, the chief executive of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, give a splendid presentation on the issue. The professor was able to be a bit more detached, but his speech was powerful. Mr. Barry Deas was in some ways more impressive because his first requirement is to meet the daily concerns and needs of fishermen who have to earn a living. Anyone who attended the meeting and anyone who follows these issues knows perfectly well that there is a real issue here which the House of Commons will surely not pretend does not exist.

Mr. Mans: In the light of what he has said, will the hon. Gentleman state how his party will preserve jobs in the fishing industry in the short term while providing stocks of fish in the long term? Bearing that in mind, he did not answer the point raised by the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) in respect of the Hague preference and the Irish Republic. Will he address that point and say what his party would do about it?

Dr. Strang: I am sorry, but that will not wash. I answered both hon. Gentlemen on the issue of Northern Ireland. However, I shall return to the important point that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

To illustrate that there is some common ground, we should recall that in the summer the Minister of State advised the House that nearly 60 per cent. of the main stocks in the waters that we fish are at risk of biological collapse. Last month, the Advisory Committee on Fishery Management of the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas warned that many EU fish stocks are outside safe biological spawning levels while fishing mortality rates are at historically high levels.

As the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology concluded in its excellent report, if action is not taken to conserve fish stocks, it will be too late to prevent total collapses in stocks, as has occurred in the American Georges bank, the Black sea and off the Canadian Grand Banks.

Let me turn to another point that must concern Members on both sides of the House. There is a worrying and growing discrepancy between the total allowable catches that are agreed every year—no doubt they will be agreed again this week in Brussels—and what is actually landed by our fishermen. As hon. Members have acknowledged—I am grateful to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) who represents an important fishing community—throughout the European Union substantial volumes of fish are being landed outwith the quotas. That is a measure of the failure of both Government policy and the common fisheries policy.

One reason for black fish landings is that fishermen sense that the total allowable catches—and the data on which the TACs are based—takes far too little account of either the fishermen's own experience of current stock levels or the socio-economic effects of wild quota fluctuations. That results in the vicious circle whereby under-reporting by fishermen further jeopardises the accuracy of the catch predictions on which the TAC should be based. Once again this year the ACFM has

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stated that misreporting had severely hampered its efforts to assess roundfish stocks in the west of Scotland. Conservative Members need to understand a simple point: if stocks are under pressure, there can be no justification for allowing the additional access of vessels from other member states to exploit those stocks. That is precisely what happened at the beginning of the year in the Irish box and the western waters.

Two Christmases ago, all the Government had to do to construct a blocking minority was to achieve the support of one large country and one small country. Yet even on an issue as clear cut as the over-exploitation of fish stocks in the waters off the south-west of England, they were unable to achieve that blocking minority. If I have pressed the Minister hard on the threatened cuts to our fleet under the multi-annual guidance programme IV, it is because of our experience on that occasion.

Dr. Spink: Will the hon. Member give way?

Dr. Strang: No, I cannot give way all the time. It is important not only that we use our veto when we have to, but that we construct and maintain a blocking minority and even sometimes achieve a qualified majority. That is how we have to engage in the European Union. There is no easy solution.

The common fisheries policy is fundamentally flawed. There is a conflict between the implementation of the principle of equal access of member states to the different fisheries within the jurisdiction of the EU and the conservation of fish stocks. Equal access to fish in all the waters of all member states is a concept that stems from the treaty principles of non-discrimination among member states.

Right hon. and hon. Members who have concluded that the United Kingdom should withdraw from the CFP are entitled to that view, but it is not the position of the Labour party. We believe that it is in the interests of the fishing industry that we stay at the European Union negotiating table.

I am pleased to see the Secretary of State for Scotland in his place this afternoon. He opened last year's debate and no one could have described the position better. I remind the House of his words:

> "Renegotiating the treaty to exclude fisheries from the scope of Community competence would be a monumental and probably impossible task. It would require unanimity and ratification by all member states and that could be bought only at a huge price."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 1353-54.]

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. He criticised the principle of equal access to the common resource; however he seemed to imply that nothing would persuade him and his party to leave the common fisheries policy. Does he not realise that the principle of equal access to the common resource is the fundamental policy of the common fisheries policy and he cannot have it both ways?

Dr. Strang: I am not attempting to have it both ways any more than the Secretary of State for Scotland did when he spoke in last year's debate. There is common ground between the Government and the official Opposition and indeed the other parties in the House of Commons that withdrawal from the common fisheries policy is not a practical option. I respect the opinion of some Conservative Members who want Britain to withdraw from the European Union. That is a perfectly respectable and arguable position, but the Labour party has no sympathy with that view.

The Labour party believes that the common fisheries policy is in need of radical reform. That is why we set out our commitment to CFP reform in "New Labour, New Life for Britain"—a document that has been endorsed at every level of the Labour party and that will be the basis for the manifesto that we will put to the people of Britain.

A Labour Government will attach a high priority to fisheries policy and to securing a reformed CFP. *[Interruption.]* The Minister would do well to read some of the debates on the CFP that took place before he took over the job. He should read our recommendations. We welcome his proposal for more regional control and more localised fisheries management. It is clear from the expression on his face that the hon. Member for St. Ives remembers that. I recall advocating that. I also remember the then Agriculture Minister, now the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, attempting to rubbish that position. He did not succeed in that and I was pleased when that and some of our more important ideas were put forward in the report of the Common Fisheries Policy Review Group—the Goodlad report—which is an excellent document.

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman says that there is no quarrel with us over the fundamentals of the CFP. If he agrees with us on regional management and the other ideas that I put forward, why on earth is he voting against us tonight? That will only send a confused signal to others in Europe. He should join us in the Division Lobby tonight.

Dr. Strang: I can assure the Minister that we consider that the Government's record on fisheries has been a disaster and that they have been utterly ineffective in their ability to represent the fishing industry in the European Union.

Mr. John D. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman said that the Labour party would push for the reform of the current common fisheries policy. Can we return to the original question of the Hague preference? The hon. Gentleman agreed with me that it was damaging to the fishing industry in Northern Ireland and, contrary to what may have been implied earlier in the debate, it has been damaging to the United Kingdom fishing industry not just recently, but for the past five years. Therefore, will the hon. Gentleman consider it not on a regional basis, but on a United Kingdom basis and let us know what the Labour party would do? Would they work to abolish the Hague preference?

Dr. Strang: With regard to the Hague preference, the Minister of State said today that he had all the fishermen's organisations—*[Interruption.]* I will answer the right hon. Member for Strangford in the way that hon. Members would expect of me.

Yes, we recognise the problem. Yes, we want action to be taken. When the Minister says that that will be achieved by international quota swapping—that is the

phrase, I believe, but he will correct me if I am wrong—that is fine. But I must say honestly and fairly to the right hon. Member for Strangford—who, I am sure, would not expect anything else—that we cannot give the Government a blank cheque to wreak whatever damage they want on the fishermen on the south-west of England by taking away their quotas; obviously not. *[Interruption.]* The Minister of State understands the point, although the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) may not.

As hon. Members who follow such matters know, it is naive to think that there is a load of fish that we can be given for nothing by other member states of the European Union to solve the problem. We hope that the Minister of State will solve it, and that he will do so in a way that will not lead to his hon. Friends who represent constituencies in the south-west of England to denounce him in January or February. The problem can be solved, but it must be done sensibly.

We should recognise that this is an extremely important fisheries debate. It is not just about the minor points raised by Conservative Members. Of course, I do not refer to the Northern Ireland issue as a minor issue, nor is the multi-annual guidance programme IV a minor issue. The Government Front Bench should take the matter more seriously, or they may come to regret it.

I referred to the Goodlad report, which is an excellent document. I thought that the Minister of State might have dwelt more on it, but perhaps the Minister who winds up will develop it further. The report contains many excellent proposals for the short and medium term, and important proposals for the longer term. If a Labour Government were elected to office, they would want to take up many of the recommendations in the report.

The Government cannot escape their record on fisheries policy: 17 years of failure. Part of the problem is that when a difficulty arises, the Government play it down or ignore it entirely. I was a little disappointed in the Minister's reference to the Guernsey fishermen's problem, which he portrayed as a problem between Guernsey and France. I trust that he is not suggesting that the United Kingdom will wash its hands of an issue that is taking place in British waters.

The Government's policy should be a source of embarrassment to Ministers. It is a pattern of foolish and unfair decisions, often reversed in the face of protest by the fishing industry, the Opposition and Conservative Back-Bench Members, who argue the case for their fishing communities. Right hon. and hon. Members will remember the unfair and unworkable compulsory tie-up regime, which led to the demeaning spectacle of our National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations having to take the British Government to the European Court.

The hon. Member for St. Ives agreed at the time that the Government had deprived the industry of a decommissioning scheme for many years. Decommissioning is not a panacea, and it is unacceptable that our vessels should be decommissioned in order to give greater opportunities to vessels from other member states of the EU to fish in UK waters or waters within the jurisdiction of the EU.

I reminded the House of the Government's disastrous failure to keep the additional Spanish vessels out of the Irish box and the western waters two years ago. That came into force this year. *[Interruption.]* The Government could not even muster a blocking minority on that issue.

I am pleased that the Government are now addressing the issue of quota hopping. In the case of some high-value species, such as sole, hake and plaice, 40 per cent. of our national quota is affected. Across the national quota as a whole, the figure is about 20 per cent. That is huge—it is disastrous. The problem has not suddenly arisen in the past few months. The Government were in office when the common fisheries policy had its 10-year review and when the new CFP regulation was negotiated. Indeed, the Government held the presidency of the Council of Ministers at the end of 1992, when the new regulation was agreed.

Mr. Nicholls *rose—*

Dr. Strang: No, I will not give way. The Government knew full well that quota hopping was an issue then—the Factortame judgment was in 1991—but they made no serious attempt to resolve the problem. Statements made by Government and fisheries Departments on their negotiating list show no trace of any move to solve the problem. In the statement made by the then Minister—the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer)—on the conclusion of the negotiations, there is no mention of any moves to resolve the problem of quota hopping.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: The Government are now talking tough on quota hopping. We welcome that. When the matter was raised at Agriculture Question Time, the Minister indicated that he was on the verge of resolving the matter.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: I repeat: I am not giving way.

Mr. Nicholls *rose—*

Dr. Strang: Again, I am not giving way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) says that he is not giving way, the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) should listen and resume his seat. *[Interruption.]* Order. I do not need a comment.

Dr. Strang: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Prime Minister—I am sorry, I mean Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am not sure whether that was a promotion, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am not sure which hon. Members were in the House for the most recent Agriculture Question Time, but those who were present will recall the assertive way in which the Minister said that the Government were on the verge of resolving quota hopping. Those of us who follow such matters closely saw the great build-up to his visit to Plymouth, where he was to announce his plan to tackle quota hopping. Many of us wondered what the Government's secret weapon was.

[Dr. Strang]

Hon. Members now know what the secret weapon was: English lessons for Spanish fishermen. That is what the Minister said. We would tackle the problem of quota hopping not just by the Spanish, but presumably also by the Dutch, by requiring those fishermen to speak English before they were given a licence to fish against our national quota. I give way to the Minister if he wants to add to that.

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman knows full well how we are going to resolve the issue of quota hoppers. We have made clear to the House the change in the protocols, and I made that clear in my speech. The hon. Gentleman misunderstood some tongue-in-cheek comments by me. On the day the Spanish Prime Minister visited the UK, he was subjected to far more questions on quota hopping than on any other issue. He went away in no doubt that that the matter had to be resolved. That is what those comments in Plymouth achieved: we have ensured that everyone in Europe realises that the problem will not go away and must be solved.

Dr. Strang: It is certainly a problem that must be solved. That is the second time the Minister has referred to all the questions put by journalists to the Spanish Minister of Agriculture. I very much doubt whether all the questions from all the journalists, whether in Plymouth, London or anywhere else, have the Spanish Government shaking in their shoes and saying, "We are certainly going to agree to change that in the IGC."

The Labour party is determined to address the issue of quota hopping.

Mr. Mans: How?

Dr. Strang: I have explained that we could have tackled the issue during the 1992 review. That was not done. If the Labour party comes to power, it will be before the completion of the intergovernmental conference, and Ministers know that. Clearly, an incoming Labour Government could—I put it no stronger than that—pick up the hand. I was simply saying to the House and the country that we shall attach a high priority to the quota hopping issue. As the Foreign Secretary stated yesterday and the Prime Minister mentioned again today, there is no question that we can go on with quota hopping on such a scale.

Conservative Members have made great play of the fact that the Opposition will vote against the Government tonight. They must be living in some dream world. The Minister knows perfectly well from the reception that he and his predecessors have received when they have visited fishing ports that no amount of media management will alter the fact that the Government's record on fisheries policy is one of failure. Seventeen years of successive Conservative Governments have meant 17 years of failure in fisheries policy. The Opposition amendment is designed to advance the case of the fishing industry and fishing communities throughout the United Kingdom. I appeal to right hon. and hon. Members to support it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I call the next hon. Member, I should tell the House that 13 hon. Members wish to speak in the remaining two and a half hours or so. May we have modest-length speeches?

6.50 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): As always, I listened with great care to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman. I must confess that I was a little baffled at the beginning of his speech but even more so by the end. I cannot understand why, since they agree precisely with what the Government are doing—at the moment at any rate—the Opposition are forcing a Division. I know that doing so is politics, to which I shall return. Not once during his speech did the hon. Gentleman give a reason for dividing the House on the motion before it. Trying to defeat the Government in such a way is purely opportunistic politics, and I hope that any Conservative Member—or, indeed, any Member on any other Bench—who is thinking of voting with the Opposition will bear that in mind.

Much mention was made in the speech of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East of the Hague preference. Its origins of course lie in a previous Labour Government, which most people may have forgotten because it was a rather long time ago. A former Labour Minister—now Lord Owen—who then represented the west country constituency of Plymouth, Devonport, signed the Hague preference and made the arrangements. It was a political deal. That is the answer to the complaint by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) about the rather mysterious cut-off point at Flamborough head. Northern Britain basically meant Scotland, and Northern Ireland and the south-west were excluded.

Even the part of the world represented by the then Member for Devonport was excluded from the Hague preference because, had it been included, there would have been awful problems with France over Brittany. The Hague preference was a political stitch-up and we are still bearing its consequences, just as the fishing industry, especially in the south-west, has had to bear the consequences of so many other political stitch-ups over the years. I therefore very much welcome my hon. Friend the Minister's comments on that subject. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland—perhaps this is more pertinent—will also very much welcome what was said.

The House will be relieved to know that this is almost certainly my last speech on fisheries matters. I have not missed a fisheries debate in the 13 years that I have had the honour to represent St. Ives. For reasons that are known to most hon. Members, I will not be standing at the next election. I shall miss these debates, which have altered considerably over the years. The times when a small group of us used to debate the issues and actually discuss which matters concerned our fishermen, rather than getting involved, as I am afraid that, inevitably, we have in this debate, in wider political considerations, seem like halcyon days. Before we lose sight of what is before the House, I hope that I may be permitted to comment briefly on some of the proposals that could affect fishermen in my constituency and the south-west constituencies of those represented ably by colleagues on both sides of the House. The fishing industry is very dear to hon. Members who represent the south-west. I am often accused by some of my hon. Friends of banging on about fishing, but the issue runs deep for anyone who has the great honour of representing a fisheries constituency.

Three areas of the Commission proposals that will be considered later this week give concern to the south-west. It must be said that the proposals before us tonight—

certainly those concerning the south-west, but generally, too—about which we have not heard much detail so far, are not quite as draconian as others have been over the years.

A number of issues naturally cause concern, the first of which relates to megrim. Western megrim stocks are basically a by-catch, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will bear that in mind. There is also the question of monkfish. Although, as I said, this year's proposals do not appear to be draconian, it must be remembered that they are on the back of massive cuts in the monkfish quota four years ago. I hope that my hon. Friend will heed the representations that I know have already been made to him on that point.

The third area of concern relates to a species which is often mentioned—certainly by south-west Members—in the House: channel cod. The complaint is that area VII b-k is huge. Yet the matter really concerns two distinct fish stocks. To lump them together in such a way distorts the fact that, in my part of the world—if I may call it that—there is often what appears to be an abundance of cod. Cod stocks should therefore be separated into more meaningful areas.

I return to what is undoubtedly the background to the debate: the common fisheries policy and the vexed question of quota hoppers. What I believe is common ground between every hon. Member who represents a fishing constituency, wherever they sit in the House, is the view that the CFP is a disaster. It must be torn up and rewritten; we must start again.

I have no doubt that there must be some form of common policy. That is perhaps not a popular thing to say, but it is a fact of life, and I would be deluding people if I said that there was some magic way in which we could just withdraw from the CFP without consequence. Yes, we could withdraw, but there would be consequences. I do not believe that we can withdraw unilaterally from the CFP if we are to stay in the European Union. People would be more honest if they put that clearly, especially to fishermen. It would be more honest to say, "All right, let us come out of the EU, if that is what you want."

As I said earlier, the trouble with the CFP, which was put in place before we entered it, has so often been that it has been built on trade-offs; its consequences so often involve trade-offs. So often, fishing has been at the worse end of a greater trade-off. I hope that for once fishing will benefit, and I believe the Government when they say that they are absolutely determined to tackle the problem of quota hopping.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his solid and sensible work over many years for the fishing industry and for the south-west. If I should be fortunate enough to return here, I shall greatly miss his contributions. He and I have stood side by side on the issue of quota hopping. Does he agree that the original relative stability agreement in 1983 could not stand beside quota hopping and that the two cannot be reconciled? Was it not therefore inevitable that the Single European Act would reduce that original agreement to nonsense?

Is not it also true that the economic implications of what the hon. Gentleman and I seek to do suggest that the only way to get round the problem is either to tear up the single market legislation or to draw down funds—some of which come from our taxpayers' contributions—from Europe for our fishermen, so that they can buy quota from Brussels in the way that the Spanish have over many years?

Mr. Harris: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said about me personally. I am not sure that what he said subsequently was entirely correct. I do not think that quota hopping can be regarded as part of the single market, because there is a great difference between a quota, which applies to a scarce resource, and some manufactured product, which should be the subject of the single market. I have never therefore regarded the problem as arising from the single market.

The judgment of the European Court of Justice in the Factortame case, which has caused the real trouble in recent times, was perverse beyond belief. We cannot have a common fisheries policy that is based on national quota and yet allow companies and individuals from other member states to buy over boats and licences and get access to that national quota. That is happening to an alarming extent, as has been said, and more than 20 per cent. of our quota is now foreign owned. That is an intolerable position.

I gave the Government full marks when they introduced section 2 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, but I wish that they had done it earlier, before Spain came in. Frankly, I wish that they had listened to me and to others who were fighting the scourge of quota hopping—in the old days, the problem was with flag of convenience vessels—as long as 16 years ago. That was the time to take action. Unfortunately, the action that they subsequently took was struck down by the European Court of Justice.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid–Kent): I am an ingenue in this debate, because I do not represent a fishing constituency, but I have always worried about this quota hopping business, because is it not the case that individual fishermen are entitled to sell their quota on the open market? Would not preventing them from doing that be an interference in one form of freedom in order to achieve another?

Mr. Harris: That could be said, but one must consider the national interest. Many fishermen who are accused of selling their licence to a foreign interest do not know that that is what they are doing, as quite often the licence is sold through a middleman—an agent, for example—who may suggest that it is being sold to another fisherman from this country, whereas in fact it ends up in Spain. I know specific examples of that.

Let me tell my hon. Friends who are considering not supporting the Government tonight that on new year's day this year I was so worried about the plight of the fishing industry that I wrote to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, spelling out the difficulties that the industry faced, not least in the south-west. I rehearsed the problems that all hon. Members who represent fishing communities know only too well. I was especially worried about the entry of Spanish vessels into Irish waters on 1 January; that is why I wrote on that date. In fact, they have not materialised in any great numbers, but the threat is still there.

I said to the Prime Minister—my hon. Friend the Minister will not mind my saying this—that he was the only person who could sort out the problems. I had a

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meeting with him in February, as a result of which—I believe—he asked his policy unit at Downing street to consider fishing. That inquiry ran in parallel with the Ministry's investigation into the common fisheries policy.

Those who lead the industry—a great industry—were extremely pleased that, within days of that policy review in Downing street beginning, they were invited there, as were I and other hon. Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter) came with me to the meeting, and other hon. Members no doubt had some input. Partly as a result, we have witnessed the emergence of a fishing policy that, although not perfect—frankly, we can never have a perfect policy on fishing—goes a long way towards meeting the well-founded concerns of the fishing industry. In particular, it represents a genuine attempt to deal with quota hopping.

I was delighted to hear the Prime Minister's reply today to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), and the replies given over the past fortnight in the Select Committees on Foreign Affairs and on European Legislation by the Foreign Secretary, by Sir Stephen Wall—the United Kingdom representative to the European Community—and by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis).

All those replies confirmed that dealing with quota hopping would be a condition of our enabling progress to be made at the intergovernmental conference. In other words, we have a veto and we intend to use it. That is the assurance that the Government have given the fishing industry. For that reason alone, I have no hesitation in voting with the Government tonight. I urge my hon. Friends, who care about fishing even though some of them do not represent fishing communities, to vote with the Government tonight. As the House knows, I have never hesitated to vote against the Government on fishing matters—I have done it many times—when I thought that that was in the best interests of the fishing industry. This is not a night to vote against the Government.

I am reinforced in my opinion by what has been said by some of the leaders of the fishing industry over the weekend. I hope that they will forgive me for quoting them. They include my constituent, Mr. Michael Townsend, the chief executive of the Cornish Fish Producers Organisation. He is of course also chairman of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations. He was reported in today's edition of the *Western Morning News* as saying:

"Fishing has always been cross-party. It's been a non-party issue and we want to keep it like that."

Mr. Jim Portus, the chief executive of the South-West Fish Producers Organisation, urged all Members of Parliament to support the Government.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): He is a Tory.

Mr. Harris: Yes, there is nothing to be ashamed of—I am a Tory, too. The hon. Member knows me well and is aware that I have never hesitated to vote against my Government when I thought that that was in the best interests of the fishing industry.

Today's editorial in the *Western Morning News*, a paper which no one can accuse of being partisan or Tory, stated:

"Don't sabotage the fishing industry.

The Government faces a knife-edge vote tonight when the EU Fisheries Policy is debated in the Commons. It is its first major test since losing its majority . . . The Opposition may see it as an opportunity to hijack the vote to bring about a crushing defeat for the Government.

But we would urge them not to do so, for the sake of the fishing industry."

For the sake of the fishing industry and for the reasons given by my hon. Friend the Minister, I do not intend to vote against the Government tonight. Even the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East could not find fault with the Government's policy—never mind the record, with which we all find fault—so he cannot urge his hon. Friends to vote against the Government.

I urge everyone on the Conservative Benches and perhaps even members of some of the minority opposition parties to back the Government so that at least my hon. Friend the Minister can attend the forthcoming meeting having won a majority vote and not, as last year, having suffered a defeat. A defeat would damage the fishing industry.

7.11 pm

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): First, I should like to echo the Minister's congratulations and tributes to the Royal National Mission for Deep Sea Fishermen. It has done a splendid job in the past century, and continues to do so, although it does not operate on the same scale as it did a decade ago.

The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and I share a number of common features. It happens that neither of us will be here after the next general election. I do not want to turn the debate into a mutual admiration society, but more often than not, he and I have shared common ground on fishery matters, and we have frequently been in the same Lobby. I intend to part company with him tonight. Later in my speech, when I outline why we should or should not vote against the Government, we shall part company again. However, we have been adversaries and sometimes allies on the fishing industry, as on one or two other matters.

There is no doubt that losing the majority does wonders for the Government's approach to, for example, a fisheries debate, when they are in danger of being defeated. As I listened to the Minister, I began to wonder whether Christmas had come early. It was as if he had gone through a checklist of all the things about which the fishing industry is unhappy. For example, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation has expressed concern about the Norway agreement on North sea haddock; problems connected with achieving participation in the enhanced north Norway cod agreement; and the Commission's proposals for west of Scotland haddock.

The Minister responded favourably to all those concerns, so much so that I was surprised by some of the reactions to the speech of our spokesman, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang). The Minister said that everything was either high priority, or near the top of the list for the negotiations. The truth is, however, that he did not say what was his bottom line. To continue in the Christmas vein, the Minister reminded me a bit of the fairy on the top of a Christmas tree. I am sorry

that he is not present, and I hope that he will not take my remarks amiss, but, like that fairy, he is very pretty and glittering, but has delivered nothing.

I do not see why the Opposition should take any lessons from the Conservatives about delivering policy, because the Conservatives are the Government. They have been the Government for so long that they have forgotten that they are the Government, so they do not seek to justify their policy. They seem to spend all their time attacking the Opposition. That is fair game and I do not object to that, except that when we attack them, the Government say that we are indulging in party politics. When they do it, however, they say that they are demonstrating sound common sense.

The House and the fishing industry must understand that there is a contradiction between deregulation and control of the fishing effort and control of the total allowable catch. One cannot opt for deregulation and at the same time expect control, nor can one expect such control to be exercised only on fishermen from other member states. Sometimes one almost thinks that that is what the industry is asking for. The industry understands that, and so must the Government.

That contradiction is at the heart of the common fisheries policy, which is regarded as part of the single market. It is impossible to argue that by analogy, so it is not possible to rebut the strong views of the Fisheries Commissioner, Mrs. Bonino, who says that it is a Common Market and that everyone can go into it. If that logic is followed, there is no common fisheries policy, except one which says that there is no control on effort or on who can catch the fish; instead, we simply have a total free-for-all. That means that everyone would keep on fishing until there were no fish left. If the North sea was regarded as simply part of the single market, that would be the inevitable conclusion, according to Mrs. Bonino. She cannot have it both ways.

We must opt for quotas and total allowable catches. I know of no one in the House or within the industry who disagrees with the proposition that there must be such controls. No one believes that, not even those who think that we should withdraw from the common fisheries policy, tear it up and start again. They argue for that not because they are in favour of a free-for-all, but because they believe that they can introduce stronger controls based on national interest.

The Fisheries Commissioner must cast aside the idea that the common fisheries policy is part of the single market. Those in the fishing industry must accept that if we are to have controls and regulations, and although the price may be great in some instances, we cannot afford to reject out of hand the possibility of satellite surveillance. If that proves to be the best way to check the direction of vessels and which waters they are or are not supposed to be in, I do not think that we can reject such a proposal. The industry must accept that it may have to swallow some unpalatable pills, whose consequences are necessary in the long run. I therefore do not reject satellite surveillance proposals.

I am glad that we have a full day for the debate. Our common objective in the past 17 years and beyond has been stability for the present and the future—without that, there can be no future planning. We want to know what is happening and we do not want quotas and TACs to change year on year, up and down like a yo-yo. We want certainty.

As the hon. Member for St. Ives and the Front-Bench spokesmen have said, the key issue is quota hopping. I was shadow transport spokesman when the first attempt was made to put the matter right. On behalf of the Opposition, I said that we would give the Government fair wind and would not frustrate the legislation. That action might be used against me tonight—it always is. In Committee on the Merchant Shipping Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) said that he did not believe that the Government were going the right way about it. We did not, however, try to stop the legislation. I do not blame the Government for getting it wrong, because they were attempting to get it right. That example shows that there has often been a bipartisan approach to the issue.

The Government's position is that the issue will be resolved at the intergovernmental conference. I would feel slightly happier if fishing was the only matter at issue at the IGC, but there are other matters to be discussed. We know of at least one other matter, and I suspect that the Prime Minister has a list as long as one's arm of the things that he wants changed. The trouble is that we have heard all this before. The Government talk tough, but they usually fail to deliver.

I do not want to extend the debate—clearly, it would be out of order if I did—but the Government have not delivered on bovine spongiform encephalopathy. The Prime Minister came back from Florence and said that, as a result of the Florence agreement, the ban on beef exports would be lifted by the end of November or the beginning of December. This afternoon, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food changed his mind and said that he would do things that he had ruled out a couple of months before, but there is still no end to the beef ban. Nobody knows when the ban will be lifted.

We remember also the Madrid conference where, again, there was a dispute during attempts to reach agreement among the Heads of State. At Madrid, the Spanish Prime Minister said to our Prime Minister, "I will not sign up unless Spanish vessels are given early access to British waters." Our Prime Minister said, "Okay. Fine. We agree." He gave way, and that, unfortunately, has been the history—fishing has always been a bargaining counter in almost every conference or agreement. Fishing always loses out. The hon. Member for St. Ives referred to the Hague preference as a stitch-up, but what is a prudent agreement and what is a stitch-up probably depends on the side of the House on which one sits. One thing about which I am certain is that fishing has always lost out, and neither main party has been able to ensure that that is not the case when in power.

One of the reasons why we cannot trust the Government is that they always have to say how well they have done. For example, on the working time directive, Ministers said that we had a great opt-out and were making changes. They were satisfied that the working time directive did not apply to us—they had won the battle. But what happened? They lost the battle, and they are now bleating about it.

One of our problems is that the political arguments do not help. I saw on the BBC teletext service today—a slightly different story was told in the House, I admit—that the Prime Minister had come to a cosy deal with

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the Ulster Unionists about the Northern Ireland fishing industry. As a concession to the Ulster Unionist Members of Parliament—

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: Just hear me out. The Prime Minister came to a deal, because he needed the votes of Ulster Unionist Members to avoid defeat. I do not know whether there is a shred of truth in that story, and if there is, I do not blame the Ulster Unionist Members, who are using their position to get the best they can for their industry. But that is not the right way to run fishing policy. Bargaining with a little bit here and a little bit there is not the answer. The Government might see a Conservative Member who may vote against them tonight and offer to take care of the problem in his constituency. Sadly, that is not the way to go about it.

The trouble is that all this talk about the intergovernmental conference is simply hot air, because the Prime Minister knows only too well that he will not be at the next IGC. After the election, the right hon. Gentleman might not even be the Leader of the Opposition. He might well be sitting where the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) currently sits, and the hon. Gentleman might well be the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Nicholls: This is a serious debate.

Mr. Hughes: Yes, it is a serious debate. The Prime Minister cares about only one thing—survival. He is treating the House of Commons as if it were a hospice for the terminally ill—he is trying to dull the pain and alleviate distress until the inevitable end comes.

Mr. William Ross: The hon. Gentleman suggested some time ago that he believed the fairy tales put about by the media. He should understand by now that as every other Opposition Member is known always to vote against the Government almost regardless of the issue, the Ulster Unionists are the only Members about whom the media can speculate. Therefore, speculation is rife, and very often wrong. I can tell him that, on this occasion, the view expressed by the media about a cosy deal is totally without foundation.

Mr. Hughes: I am glad that I allowed the hon. Gentleman to put that on the record. I said that I was not concerned one way or the other whether there was a shred of truth in the story. We are all honourable Members in this place, and I take his word that no cosy deal has been done. It may be that a cosy deal was offered, but we shall leave that aside.

The one fortunate thing is that the end of this Government is not far away—it is four to five months away. It will then be for my right hon. and hon. Friends to take up the cudgels to obtain changes to the CFP, to give it stability and justice. I hope that whoever follows the hon. Member for St. Ives and me into this House will be as strong in their defence of the fishing industry as he has been. For that reason, I shall be voting against the Government. I want to bring them down as soon as possible, and I hope that we can do so.

7.25 pm

Sir Richard Body (Holland with Boston): The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) berated the Government in somewhat quieter tones than the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang). I have great respect for the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East, especially for his views on agricultural policy, which we seem almost to share. I take it that he was as responsible as anyone for drafting the Labour amendment. I can think of only one word to describe the amendment, and I fear that it may be out of order. I can think of no more elegant phraseology than that word, which is "humbug".

The hon Member for Edinburgh, East berated with fury what has gone on for the past 17 years, but has he forgotten what he was doing in 1976? In that year, Community law was laid down in a regulation governing the future direction of the CFP. At the heart of that policy was the principle of equal access, so that we in this country and our fishermen had no more right to the waters that had previously been ours than any of the other member states. From that has stemmed all the troubles that we have with the CFP.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East will know that in 1976 the then Labour Government had a veto, which they did not exercise. If only they had exercised that veto and prevented the 1976 regulation from coming about, we would not have had any of the consequences for the past 17 years, about which he has complained. But that is not what he did, nor what that Government did. I think that I am right in saying that he was in an office that had some influence over those matters.

I commiserate with my hon. Friend the Minister of State, who has a miserable job—it is an impossible job. He knows, as do all of us with an interest in any part of the fishing industry, that we could once again have a fishing industry as large and as prosperous as it was many years ago. But we cannot have that prosperity again—it is not possible—as long as we do not have the same rights to waters as those enjoyed by any self-governing nation state of the world. That is the truth of the matter.

As the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) has said many times before, we have lost that right of control and until we regain it, we shall never have an effective conservation policy and we shall never restore our fishing stocks. Furthermore, we shall never be able to deal with industrial fishing, which has now become an evil because it sweeps up millions of undersized fish which, in times past, would have been left in the sea to mature so as to be caught at a later stage when they were worth eating.

In the North sea, the numbers of five important species are now so dangerously low that they are nearing the point of irreversible decline. Those are herring, mackerel, cod, plaice and sole—five species that have been on the plates of all hon. Members many times. They are popular species and we should sustain those resources permanently, in large quantities, as they were sustained in the past. In the North sea, stocks have now fallen so low that we might soon reach an irreversible position. I hope that the Minister is aware of that problem and knows that it is deeply serious.

All of us who have any part of the fishing industry in our constituencies know that my hon. Friend the Minister of State has travelled up and down the country explaining the Government's difficulties and their policies. He has

been listening and learning and many fishermen appreciate what he has been trying to do. However, I wish that he would not use the term "non-negotiable" in respect of our six to 12-mile limit. That term is causing some anger among many fishermen because, if one says that those fishing rights are non-negotiable, it suggests that their ownership is ours, that we have a right to them and that we will not concede that right. The fact is that we conceded those rights long ago, when we entered the European Community. Those waters are as much Community waters as those beyond the 12-mile limit.

Let me underline that point. If my hon. Friend the Minister of State, who is a lawyer, were my landlord who had given me a 10-year lease, and I were to go round telling my neighbours that I would continue to have possession and that my rights were non-negotiable, as a lawyer and a landlord, my hon. Friend would tell me that I was deceiving myself and my neighbours. I therefore urge him to abandon the term "non-negotiable". I know what he means, but his use of a phrase that fishermen resent is not doing him any good.

Fishermen feel that over the years they have been deceived, I regret to say, by hon. Members on both sides of the House. The Liberal Democrats have probably been the worst offenders and the Scottish and Welsh nationalists have been no better. I have to admit that the Ulster Unionists on both sides of the House have probably behaved in the most frank and honest manner in respect of the fishing industry.

The time has now come for us to be frank with the fishing industry and to say that our hands are tied and that there is a limit to what we can do. I appreciate what my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) has said about the common fisheries policy. He has denounced it with great charm and great firmness, but the only real answer is to reassert ourselves. To concede that we should have a common fisheries policy of any kind is unwise and unnecessary. If we are to have a successful Community that is to enlarge to include 25, 30 or more countries, we have to forget about having a common fisheries policy. It would be impossible and absurd to allow countries such as Estonia and Latvia, which have their own fishing fleets, to have equal access with ours.

As part of any enlargement, we have to say that every member state should have its own fishing policy. Let us act as if we were a self-governing nation state, with control of our own waters, so that we can have a prosperous fishing industry in future.

7.34 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body). He attacked my party and other Opposition parties, but it is fair to say that, after fisheries debates in recent years, we have found ourselves in the Lobby in support of the fishing industry more often than have Conservative Members. When he raises the red herring of access to waters, he must know that the derogation has been challenged in the courts by the Spaniards and that that case failed.

New members of the Community are generally excluded from waters that they have not traditionally fished and there is no reason to suspect that Estonia will be treated any more favourably, unless it gives us a major concession that blinds the Minister of the day. That is unlikely. To put up such Aunt Sallies does not help, because it increases uncertainty within the industry. Mrs. Bonino has indicated that there is no likelihood of the derogation on the six to 12-mile limit being challenged in the 2002 review.

I welcome the widespread attention being given to our annual fisheries debate and I am grateful to the Government's business managers for allowing it additional time. The Minister of State's tour of fishing ports around the country, trying to woo hon. Members, was interesting. My hon. Friends and I were speculating about how he would try to woo the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), but he was not prepared to compromise on a unilateral renunciation of the common fisheries policy. We look forward with interest to seeing whether enough has been said this evening to persuade the hon. Member for Ludlow.

Despite all the political attention focused on the vote at the end of the debate, we should not lose sight of the fact that we are considering the details of a regulation that will have a considerable impact in the forthcoming year on the lives and the livelihoods of fishermen and on the communities to which they belong, from Shetland to Cornwall. Against that background, I hope that the Minister will respond to several pertinent questions, many of which have already been raised and to some of which the Minister has already referred. When he winds up, I hope that the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), will be able to take them on.

Traditionally, much of the December debate focuses on the total allowable catches—or TACs—for the next year. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and I have taken part in many of these debates over the years. We both first spoke in December 1983 and at that time, as in subsequent years, the Minister's remit at the Fisheries Council was that he should unequivocally negotiate the best deal for our fishermen. Of course, when TACs were negotiated at Fisheries Councils in the past, most of them were taken up by British fishermen. The position is different in respect of the TACs to be negotiated at this week's Fisheries Council: 44 per cent. of the plaice quota, 46 per cent. of the hake quota, 20 per cent. of the sole quota, and 29 per cent. of the anglers quota—all high-value species—will be fished by non-British fishermen. That is a result of the quota hopping that has been the subject of much of the discussion so far and to which I shall return.

Representations from fishing organisations have highlighted many of their concerns and, although I would agree with the hon. Member for St. Ives that the list is not quite as long as in some years, the points they raise are important. It is generally felt that the pelagic settlement is reasonably satisfactory, but disappointment is expressed at the fact that, despite the industry having taken a 50 per cent. cut in the TAC for herring earlier this year, the cut in sprats is only half that amount. Given that sprat fishing takes up a number of juvenile herring, that issue should be re-examined.

The Minister may wish to say something about the deal that was struck at the weekend on Atlanto-Scandian herring, which is welcomed by the industry. The EU amount is less in the forthcoming year, but it is thought that, given that fishermen will be allowed to fish some of it in Norwegian and Faroese waters and land in Norway, it has considerable value. It would be helpful if the Minister

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would say that there will be no impediment to British vessels starting fishing that on 1 January 1997, so that they can start establishing a track record for what may be a very important fishery for the future.

From a Scots perspective, with regard to the white fish species, there is major concern about the significant cut in the TAC for west of Scotland haddock, as the Minister of State acknowledged in response to a question by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). It is believed that the scientific evidence might justify a status quo for haddock; I hope, especially as it is a precautionary TAC, that Ministers will focus their minds on that in the forthcoming Council meeting.

Similar consideration applies to North sea haddock, where the TAC cut comes in the wake of a significant cut in the cod quota. Many people accept the need for tougher measures with regard to cod, to conserve a seriously depleted stock, but it does not follow that there should be the same cut for haddock, especially as it is possible to fish haddock clean of cod. I hope that North sea haddock will be given special attention.

There is scepticism about the precautionary TAC for west of Scotland saithe, a problem which might be better resolved by uplifting the TAC than by invoking the Hague preference, which has been a subject of some discussion.

On the subject of cod, there are obvious difficulties in fishing in the North sea and west of Scotland. The Minister will confirm that there is an increase in the cod available in north Norway for Community vessels. I shall not go into individual constituency cases now, but I hope that the Minister will accept that there is an opportunity for vessels from the Scottish fleet to go to north Norway, and that any representations that he receives on that will receive sympathetic consideration.

From the perspective south of the border, I know that the Minister is aware that on North Sea plaice, it is feared that the European Union agreement with Norway produced a situation where a swift recovery of stocks might lead to a dislocation in the industry, whereas a slower recovery, by retaining the status quo at 81,000 tonnes, would be helpful in maintaining the well-being of those who have been fishing plaice in the North sea.

A similar view is taken on the disproportionate cut in North Sea sole quota. I understand that, at last year's Council, there was direct negotiation with Norway on plaice. I hope that the Minister can confirm that, if it comes to it, he will be prepared to do that again.

The industry believes that, unlike other areas, the Irish sea boasts stable stocks of cod, and that a higher TAC there, thus avoiding Hague preference, would be better for English and Ulster fishermen.

We were told by the Minister of State that the industry had generally signed up to a review of the Hague preference. I understand that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation was told about the proposal at a meeting that the Minister of State came into today and that some things were said about it, but it certainly could not be thought that the federation had signed up to it.

I say as constructively as I can that, obviously, the issue is sensitive. In fisheries debates we have often appealed to Ministers to invoke the Hague preference, which has brought benefits over the years. It does not help if people feel that they have been bounced into a position that they have not. I hope that a greater sensitivity on that issue will be shown, perhaps even by the Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office when he replies to the debate.

I know that the Under-Secretary of State is especially concerned about salmon farming, which is a matter for the Council. He knows, as we all do, that the Government eventually agreed to apply to the Commission for a minimum import price. That has not been forthcoming. Apparently, Mrs. Bonino gave the Minister short shrift when he went on a special errand to try to get it. Is it possible for the Council to take the matter into its hands? It is intolerable that some of the most efficient salmon farmers in Scotland—in Shetland, my constituency—are obliged to sell their product at below production cost. As the Minister knows, that is unsustainable. An emergency response is needed, and we very much hope that he can make progress on that.

I said that in the past, and in relation to the current round, fishermen have expressed scepticism about some of the TACs that have been set. People might argue that the fishermen would say that because they want to fish more, but self-evidently it is not in the interests of the fishing industry to kill off the stocks on which it and future generations will depend. We should not dismiss the experience and expertise that skippers can contribute to the inexact science of stock assessments.

Mr. Salmond: I did not realise that the hon. Gentleman had left the subject of salmon farming. Is he aware that, at the weekend, a former Commissioner, a Mr. Bruce Millan, attributed the failure of the Scottish junior Minister to achieve satisfactory results to ministerial inexperience? Regardless of whether it was inexperience, it was certainly a very belated effort.

Mr. Wallace: The House well knows that we argued for some time before the Cabinet would accept the position. I am not sure that it helps the Minister in his attempt to win something for us at the weekend if we all denounce him as being inexperienced. I know that the Minister and the Scottish Office have taken a very positive approach to that. Our complaint lay with other Departments. Now that, at long last, the Government have got a line on that, we wish the Minister well and hope that he can negotiate something positive for the salmon farming industry at the end of the week.

I was saying that, in proposing radical reform of the common fisheries policy, Liberal Democrats recommend the decentralisation of management, with the involvement of skippers and fisheries scientists. That would lead to better informed decision making, and decisions to which people have contributed are more likely to command their confidence and active co-operation.

What the Minister of State said today, repeating almost verbatim one of the points that he made in the 10-point plan that he unveiled in Plymouth, gives us cause for hope that that approach—a much more regional dimension, local management of fisheries—will gain momentum. As the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) said, Liberal Democrats have called for that in many debates. Sometimes Ministers have tried to rubbish us, but we will always welcome the sinner that repents. We only regret the fact that it has taken 17 years and a minority Government to bring about their repentance, but we encourage them in developing that line of thinking.

That was one of the recommendations of the common fisheries policy review group, in which my constituent, Mr. John Goodlad, played a constructive and distinguished part. When do the Government intend to respond formally to the 40 or more recommendations of the review group? The Minister said that that would happen in the near future, but following such a high-quality, constructive report, we want a better idea of the timetable for a response and implementation.

I agreed with many of the report's conclusions, including the non-viability of renouncing the common fisheries policy unilaterally and the need to boost decommissioning, to consider a scrap and build policy and to consider other institutional arrangements, including regionalism.

There are immediate issues to be dealt with, including the position on multi-annual guidance programme IV and flags of convenience. As we have heard time and again tonight, the two are linked, not solely because of the linkage that the Government have stated, but because it is unreasonable to set a further MAGP requirement for Britain when we are purporting to negotiate the removal from the fisheries register of 20 per cent. of the fleet flying the Union flag as a matter of convenience.

Do the Government intend to make any negotiations on quota hopping retrospective? The Government have said that they have taken the initiative by seeking a solution to the problem in the IGC, but what do they mean by a solution? Will it apply to future transfers of licences or will there be a retrospective element?

What is being done to pursue the initiative? The hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), in an intervention, suggested that the reference to that important aspect of our negotiations on the IGC had been dropped from the Irish proposals and relegated to an appendix. I understand that there was a four-line reference to it on page 134 under the heading, "Part B—Other Issues". I am not sure that that is the type of profile that has been presented to us in the House. What profile are Ministers seeking for that? How often have member state capitals been visited by Ministers or by departmental senior officials to promote the ideas? I do not expect the Minister to show us his full negotiating hand, but we would like to be reassured that there is some tangible evidence of progress. His winding-up speech will give the Minister an opportunity to transmit such a message, not just to the House but to the fishing industry.

Related to that is a point that I raised in an intervention. What precisely is the Government's attitude to MAGP IV? Last June, the Minister was talking about assembling a blocking minority. In October, in a letter to the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, the Prime Minister said:

"we have made it clear that we will not implement further compulsory cuts in the UK fleet while the quota hopping issue remains unresolved".

The Minister of State gave a complex reply to that question, replying further to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East that the Government were not contemplating such action. We want to know whether this is a question of trying to block the provision, or whether it is a question of allowing an agreement to be reached by the other member states which we will not implement. It is important for that to be clarified. Those issues—quota-hopping and capacity reduction—have crept up on the Government because of their neglect in the past.

The hon. Member for St Ives (Mr. Harris) said that his reason for voting for the Government tonight was the response that he had received from the Prime Minister to a letter that he had sent him on 1 January earlier this year. The response that I have had is my reason for voting against the Government. Where were they for 17 years, if it is only now that they have woken up and have what the hon. Gentleman described as a fisheries policy?

It is not as if the Government were not warned. At the time when pressure stock licences were introduced, some of us argued that, rather than being sold on, they should revert to a pool and perhaps be reallocated, thus ensuring that the remoter fishing communities of our country would not lose out through the licences' being drawn away to—as many of us thought—other parts of the United Kingdom, or, as has in fact happened, to other countries. The monetary ethic of Thatcherism prevailed, however. In time, many skippers found that the best offers came from foreign vessel owners. Nothing was done about the problem during our presidency in 1992, and it remains today.

Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, many Opposition Members and some exceptional Conservative Members—the hon. Member for St Ives was one, and we heard especially distinguished contributions from the late Alick Buchanan-Smith—argued for a well-funded decommissioning scheme, but too little was done too late. As a result, as other European Union countries, notably Spain, now receive grants to modernise their fleet, our fleet, unaided, grows older. That is due either to wilful neglect or to a cavalier disregard for the industry on which so many livelihoods depend, both at sea and on shore, in communities where alternative employment can be scarce.

We have heard much rhetoric, but the details of implementation have been scanty. The amendment that has been selected—like the amendment tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends and me—calls the Government to account for their stewardship of fisheries policies over the past 17 years. Regrettably, it has been a record of neglect and failure, and we will vote against the Government tonight.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I must point out that nine hon. Members wish to speak in the 97 minutes that are available before the winding-up speeches. I hope that, with a bit of co-operation, they will all be able to do so.

7.52 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): The fishing industry in Northern Ireland continues to suffer one blow after another as a result of policies dictated by the common fisheries policy in Brussels.

Let me remind the House of the vital importance of the fishing industry to Northern Ireland's economy. More than 2,000 people are employed in the industry, with another 1,200 actively engaged on fishing trawlers. The entire industry is worth more than £20 million per year to the Northern Ireland economy. In recent years, however, the industry has suffered one major crisis after another. Each year, fishermen's livelihoods are put in jeopardy as a result of annual cuts in the fishing quotas in the Irish sea, and this year is no exception.

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

Once again, we face the prospect of Irish sea fishing quotas' being reduced from a level that is already intolerable. Since 1990, the total allowable catch in the Irish sea has been reduced by 40 per cent. We are saying that we cannot take any more reductions: if the TAC is reduced any further, there will be no fleet left. Those are the stern, hard facts that the Northern Ireland fishing industry faces. This year, it is proposed that the cod quota should remain at 6,200 tonnes, and the sole quota at 1,000 tonnes. Whiting, however, is down 30 per cent. from 9,000 to 6,400 tonnes, and plaice from 2,450 to 1,800. The herring catch has been restricted to 7,000 tonnes.

Along with the leader of the SDLP—who, like me, happens to be a Member of the European Parliament—and accompanied by the chairmen of Mourne, Newtownards and Down councils and their staff and councillors and the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), I was part of a delegation that met the top brass of the fishing commission. We were amazed at its ignorance of what was happening in the Irish sea. Its members told us that fish were scarce, saying, "We are only doing this to give you some industry." They said that conservation must take place.

Before we went there, the commission told the fishermen that they could not have any more haddock out of the sea—that they were very scarce. Well, there are more haddock in the Irish sea tonight than there have been since Noah's Ark floated on the waters. The commission's leading expert admitted something to is: he said, "When I was told that there were haddock in the Irish sea and that they were spawning, I did not believe it, but I went on my own and discovered that the fishermen were right." Why cannot those fishermen take the haddock out of the sea? That expert also confirmed something about herring. It is more than ever possible to fish for herring in the Irish sea—and not red herring.

We were told that nephrops—or prawns, as they are commonly called—were ample and abundant; yet the proposal is to keep the fishermen from fishing for them. What sort of scheme is this so-called common fisheries policy? That is what the fishermen who are sitting in the Strangers Gallery are asking, and rightly so. Why can they not fish for the fish that are plentiful? We look to the Government to do something.

There has been talk of the Hague preference. In 1992, a Minister promised in the House of Lords that the Government were determined to do something about the Hague preference in regard to the Irish sea. What did they do? They did nothing. Meanwhile, our fishermen must watch the spectacle of fishermen from the Republic—when the Republic takes up its option—coming into their fishing grounds, and fishing freely where our men are not allowed to fish for their own fish. That must cease.

I understand the worry about the Hague preference expressed by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). In certain cases, it gave precedence to extra fish for British fishermen, but in the Irish sea we have a problem different from problems anywhere else. The Government must face up to that problem, and a satisfactory result must be found.

The Irish Republic has a very liberal quota and from its point of view it is right to say that there are not many fish in the Irish sea. The fewer fish that it says there are the better a quota it will have and the more it can ask for the Hague preference to be brought into play. I can understand Irish Ministers saying, "We have to be careful about the Irish sea or we shall take everything out of it." It suits their policy to say that.

Where there are fish in abundance people should be allowed to catch them. Northern Ireland fishermen are told, "Your catch has been reduced by 40 per cent. Now cut it again by 30 per cent. to give a total cut of 70 per cent." Next year, they will suggest that we cut it by another 10 per cent. Day after day our fishing industry is being decimated. I pity Northern Ireland Members who have fishing interests in their constituencies. We come here and speak about the industry and travel to Brussels but evidently there are to be no changes.

The Government should look at the Lassen report although, of course, it has been overtaken by other matters. It suggested reducing our fleet by another 40 per cent. It might as well state that we should give up the industry altogether. Now it has come up with another view of segmentation of the fleet, and that would be disastrous. Fishermen tell me that, because of its capacity, it would be impossible to do that with the Northern Ireland fleet.

Our prawn fisheries have also been attacked because it is said that prawns are scarce. But even the scientists say that there are plenty of prawns and Lassen is one of Europe's top officials. There is grave concern about the technical conservation measures that are being proposed by the Commission. They include measures about the size of the nets, the size of fish that can be landed and the areas in which fish can be caught.

In the Irish sea the proposals take no account of the regional diversities of home waters. For example, prawns are one of the most important stocks for Ulster fishermen, but the Commission proposes to increase the minimum landing size from 70 mm to 105 mm overnight. There is no justification for that and scientists are arguing about it. Even the Department's scientists advise us that if this measure is introduced in the Irish sea we would have to forget about 60 per cent. of all the prawns that are currently fished: 60 per cent. would be lost. What is left to fishermen who are faced with such percentages? The Government must go to Europe and save us from the discrimination that seems to be applied to Northern Ireland's fishermen. There is a vendetta to destroy the Province's entire fishing fleet. It is a matter of life and death.

We hear much about decommissioning, but what do Northern Ireland fishermen do when their vessels have been decommissioned? They have nowhere to go. Are we to say to those people, "Although there are plenty of fish you must decommission your boat"? A fishermen told me, "I thought that it was best for me to decommission, and I did. I did my best to start a company with the money but I had many problems and I was unable to run a viable company. I had to buy another vessel to eke out some sort of living in what I was brought up to do."

The Government must adopt a vigorous stance in Europe. This is a fight for the existence of our fleet. It is a scandal that other member states, notably the Spanish, are effectively exporting their overcapacity problem to the United Kingdom by being allowed to operate vessels under the British flag and fish against our quotas. Government commitments on that issue must be

honoured. No longer should our fishing industry have to work under the regime of a European fishing policy that is crushing to death the industry in Northern Ireland.

In 1992 the European Commission report entitled "Regional, Socio-economic Studies in the Fisheries Sectors" stated that Northern Ireland was the one area where fishing should be maintained as a priority because of unemployment. But what has happened? Many people in Northern Ireland wonder why the European Union strives to spend hundreds of millions of pounds in Northern Ireland—and of course that money is welcome—while adopting measures under the common fisheries policy which have the inevitable effect of making redundant people who are active in one of Ulster's most important industries.

The Government must recognise the tragic situation of fishing in Northern Ireland. They must not give us words: they must return from Europe having taken action that we can see.

8.6 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): The Minister started by painting a rather glowing picture of the industry. He said that it was prosperous, well-invested and coming along well under his ministrations. But the reality is rather different. The industry is in severe financial difficulties. It is not making enough to invest and finds it difficult even to keep going. Many people have to continue to fish to maintain a return on the borrowing with which they are lumbered. That is the real state of the industry and it is why British licences have been sold to quota hoppers.

I want to smash the television screen every time I see a European Commission official saying that British fishermen have sold licences to Spanish fishermen. They did that because they were in debt and were not making enough money. The Spanish were able to buy those licences because they had reached their multi-annual guidance targets by reflagging many of their vessels as British and therefore got access to European funds. That brought them within the target and opened the route to European money, but by the same token our fishermen were above their target and did not have access to European money and were forced to sell their vessels. It is a vicious circle.

The industry is not as prosperous as the Minister says. It faces threats and uncertainties and a reluctance by financial institutions to lend it money. That is one of the real problems. There is no confidence in the future because of constant threats of massive shutdowns and cuts in the British fleet, which has not had adequate backing from the Government, and because the common fisheries policy is not only wrong, as several Ministers have said, but is a conservation disaster.

The CAP is so disastrous that I am surprised that it has not been endorsed by the Spice Girls because it is on the same level as the disaster that the Government are achieving. The Commissioner is disastrous. Commissioner Bonino changes her mind so often that it seems from reading the press releases that there is a different Commissioner every month. She goes in for frequent changes of policy. She said at the beginning that she did not want the portfolio and did not understand it. She has demonstrated that at some length over the years.

The policy puts fishermen in competition with each other so that the natural character of fishermen to be hunters is not alleviated by any tendency to make them harvesters and get them to work together. They are compelled to compete, largely through the quota system and although quotas are an acceptable way to divide catches, they are disastrous when they are used for management purposes. They lead inevitably to discards. Fish caught over quota or fish that are outside quota are just dumped back in the sea—dead. As the quotas come down, the discards go up. The system forces fishermen into either discarding fish on an increasing scale or into illegalities.

The system is still not adequately policed because the control at ports of landing in Europe is totally inadequate. They do not care about British quotas. Why should they bother to enforce them? Vessels, particularly the quota hoppers, land not here, but in Europe, where they are not adequately policed.

Some quota hoppers of course come here to collect benefit, not to land fish. We cannot have a proper policy unless we have effective European policing. The policy goes for broad, lowest common denominator measures that will not work, such as the proposed increase in the mesh size to 110 mm. That is too big to provide an economic future for fishing.

I find it appalling that the industry's proposals for conservation—I refer in particular to those from the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations in 1993—have never yet had a considered reply. They are the path of the future. They include technical and national measures and greater control for the coastal state. The NFFO put them to the Government, but there was no answer. Without consulting the industry, the Government made their own proposals to the European Commission, which came back with appalling conservation programmes that would never have worked.

The Commission insisted, for instance, on dealing with the Spanish catching and landing of small fish by reducing minimum landing sizes. It tried to deal with the discards problem by providing that discards did not have to be dumped overboard immediately, but could be carried until the end of the voyage, which we know means outside British waters, where the fish would almost certainly be landed before they were required to be dumped.

The only sensible proposals on conservation have come from the NFFO. It has proposed square mesh panels. The Commission has made that messy by insisting that such panels should be the same size as diamond mesh panels, which is impracticable. The NFFO has proposed a ban on industrial fishing, which we need immediately, and a system of sustainable fishing, which is to be achieved partly by more selective fishing, which is right in itself, but partly by technical conservation measures under the management of the coastal state.

That is the future. We need to devolve power down, under what might be called subsidiarity in other mouths, from Brussels and from the Commission to management by the coastal state and, within that, to regional management systems that involve people fishing in the region. In other words, we need systems that empower, involve and bring fishermen into consultation with scientists because there is far too little of that. The fishermen feel that they are being totally ignored and that their practical knowledge has been rejected. The systems should empower them to manage the system.

The Minister has moved a little way by talking of regional measures, but those are consultative proposals. We need regional management structures that involve

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

fishermen in their own fate to make them stakeholders in their industry and to give them responsibility for feeling that it is their fish, so ensuring that they work together for the common purpose.

All that has been proposed by the NFFO and by North East Lincolnshire council. We shall put those proposals to the Minister. That is the way that the industry needs to go for power to be handed down from Brussels and for the producer organisations not only to manage their quotas, but to stop the transfer of licences outside their region. We have had a steady drain of Grimsby quotas to Scotland.

Under pressure from the House, the Minister has moved some way in our direction. I approve of his proposals on quota hoppers. I ask him not to agree to multi-annual guidance programme IV until quota hoppers are taken out of the equation. If he does agree to cuts in effort, they must be made after quota hoppers have been taken out of the equation because 20 per cent. of our fleet is made up of quota hoppers. The reduction in effort that will be demanded of us under MAGP IV is about 20 per cent. Take out the quota hoppers and we are bang on target and we have access to European funding. That is the way to go. The Minister must therefore resist MAGP IV until quota hoppers are taken out of the equation.

I hope that the Minister will resist too the barmy proposals—I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) who spoke earlier—on satellite monitoring because they will be divisive in the fleet in relation to vessels over 24 m. The proposals will be expensive and who pays? As usual in Britain, the fishermen will be asked to pay. The proposals will provide no guide to what fishermen are doing. If a boat is sat there with either its satellite transmitter or engine broken, it is committing an illegality under the system. It reduces other methods of control in favour of this broad brush approach that will not work.

I am not as critical of the Minister this year as I have been in previous years. He has helped and moved a considerable way in the direction of sense, particularly on quota hoppers, but also in considering regional structures and in giving a greater role to the coastal state. Having pushed him this far, we should vote against him to push him further because, obviously, nothing works on the Government as effectively as a lost vote, which produces the sort of help and support that they have denied to the industry.

The basic problem in the Government's approach has been that fishing has been hit by a double whammy. It has had a battering from Europe by a common fisheries policy that is unworkable, unsuitable and damaging to our industry. That has been compounded by the withholding of Government help, which has been provided to every other competing industry in Europe, but not to ours. That is the double whammy. The industry has been hit both ways.

At last the Minister has begun to do something about Europe. We shall encourage him to do something about the financing of the industry so that we can have a genuine scrap-and-build programme, and a genuine plan for fishing to restore confidence, for modernisation of our fishing boats and for giving confidence to institutions putting money into the industry so that financial institutions respond. We will be able to get something done about the fishing industry's needs by voting against the Government tonight.

8.16 pm

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): As someone who has represented a fishing port for 17 years, I have seen the industry progressively damaged by the common fisheries policy. In retrospect, we must be honest: it is clear that the industry was betrayed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), who signed up to a treaty that forced the United Kingdom to surrender British fishing grounds to Europe. The industry was equally betrayed by the late Lord Wilson, who, at the time of the renegotiation, did not put the treaty right.

Fish inside our waters have ceased to be a national resource and today are a Community resource. It has always seemed strange to me that we pump up oil from the North sea and that oil is British oil, but the fish swimming around the oil rigs are European fish.

Leaving aside those objections, one must be fair. The CFP's aims were sensible. They were to improve conservation so that fish stocks would increase year on year and we would have a growing and prosperous fishing industry. No one, however, could believe that the CFP has achieved any of its aims. The British industry is in a parlous state. We have an aging fleet. There is a lack of investment and we are under continual pressure from the Community to reduce the size of our fleet and our quotas.

What are the specific failures? Far from stocks increasing every year because of the CFP so that we can increase quotas progressively every year, the stocks of many species are going down. Once more, there are proposals to reduce our quotas. The Community has failed to put into operation effective technical conservation measures. How can the policy be said to conserve when thousands upon thousands of tonnes of fish—the discards—are put back into the sea dead to pollute the oceans?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) said, there has been a complete failure to ban industrial fishing. There has been no attempt to deal with the growing problems of seals. The population is increasing dramatically in the North sea, with damage to salmon and to other fish stocks.

Above all, however, the policy discriminates against the UK. We provide much the largest portion of the waters of the northern seas of the European Union, yet we receive only about a quarter of the quota. May I give an example of how the restrictions affect Bridlington boats? Is it not nonsense that, in the British section of the North sea, we have virtually no quota for coley?

Coley is a large fish. Inevitably, when our fleet fishes from Bridlington for North sea cod and haddock, coley is also caught—but it has to be thrown back into the sea. For some reason, the French have a large coley quota in the North sea, in our waters, which they do not take up most years. Since I have been making this point, however, they decided to take up their quota last year. I do not know whether they are fiddling the figures.

European Union funds are given disproportionately to other European countries. I asked a parliamentary question on 21 November about how much of the fishing budget each country had received. Britain, with the largest

waters, received 25 million ecu, whereas Spain received 174 million ecu and Germany—which has far smaller waters than Britain—received virtually the same. France received 37 million ecu.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Townend: If I give way, I will not be able to keep to the requested 10 minutes.

Mr. Salmond: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on what he is saying. However, is he unaware that the figures that he has just given are the result of the Government's policy of not enabling the fishing industry to have access to the very funds that he mentioned?

Mr. Townend: That does not get away from the fact that the Spaniards have been subsidised by the European Union to build boats and they have also been given the finances to buy our licences and become quota hoppers. The whole thing is absolute nonsense.

I support the Government's efforts to end quota hopping, but I only wish that the Opposition today had come out in full support of that policy and said that if they were elected at the next general election they would veto the intergovernmental conference if it did not deal with the problem of quota hopping. However, they did not say that. They never make a commitment, they just imply that they will do something. I challenge the Labour Front-Bench spokesman to give a commitment to the industry that if the Labour party is elected it will veto the IGC unless it deals with the matter.

If we are opening up the whole issue, the Government should take the opportunity at the IGC to transfer British waters back to British control under the doctrine of subsidiarity. Once the fish in our waters are British again, we can have a sensible administration for the benefit of conservation and the British fishing industry, under a coastal management scheme.

We can but compare our situation with that of Norway, which is outside the common fisheries policy. My fishermen tell me that in the Norwegian section of the North sea the cod are much bigger and there are not the same problems with discards. The Norwegian industry is prosperous; there is no shortage of money for investment.

Despite all the commitments, if we do not take the opportunity now open to us my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston will be proved to be right. In the early years of the next century—2002, I believe—foreign boats will be fishing right up to our waters and there will be equal access for everyone. That will be disastrous.

I want to raise a few points that my fishermen feel are important and which I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will deal with when he replies to the debate. The fishermen believe it absolutely vital to maintain the fisheries industry safety group. They believe that there should be minimum landing sizes. They want an improvement in the stock assessment that forms the basis of quotas. For years, they have been based on the recommendations of scientists. If they had been right, we should have been able to look forward each year to increasing stocks. The scientists have not been right and the fishermen's perspective of stock should not be ignored, as the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) said.

The fishermen want us to do everything possible to ensure that there is no cut this year in the North sea cod quota. Some 80 to 90 per cent. of my fishermen depend on cod, so a cut would be devastating for the Bridlington industry. There is also no justification for keeping down the quota for North sea haddock, which is not under the same pressure as cod, merely because it is caught in the same fisheries.

Finally, we must deal with the problem of seals—despite the view of environmentalists. The seals are reproducing at an enormous rate and it is wrong to say that they do not affect the fishing industry. I have seen salmon, caught by my fishermen, with big bites taken out of them. Seals are like foxes—they do not eat salmon, they just take big bites out of them and ruin them for the fisherman.

Having dealt with the problems of Bridlington, I want to say a word on behalf of those British fishermen who are not represented in the House. I speak, of course, of the fishermen of Guernsey, whose waters are now being pillaged by the French. The French have been breaking agreements and have had their naval fishery protection vessels supporting their fishermen in the waters off Guernsey.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Our Navy has been present.

Mr. Townend: I am pleased to hear that. Will my hon. Friend the Minister confirm that, as it is not the information that I have been given? If the Navy is there, I hope that it will take a higher profile. We should let the fishermen of Guernsey know that we are prepared to fight for their rights, just as we were prepared to fight for the rights of the Falkland islanders.

8.25 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I want to place on record my appreciation to the Minister and to Baroness Denton, the Northern Ireland Office Minister responsible for fisheries, who visited my constituency a couple of weeks ago and discussed many problems with fishing organisations and fishermen.

I want at the outset to quote from a 1992 European Commission report, "Regional Socio-Economic Studies in the Fisheries sector". It said that in Northern Ireland

"there are currently very few alternate employment opportunities. Perhaps this is the one area where the maintenance of fish and related industry employment should be a priority."

In other words, the Commission said that the Northern Ireland fishing industry is special and worthy of being given priority in its dealings under the general guidance and rules.

I raise that matter because we are talking about conservation matters. I must embellish what the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) said by citing three statistics relevant to the fishing industry in Northern Ireland. First, to date there has been a reduction of about 35 per cent. in our fishing fleet. Secondly, there has been a 25 per cent. reduction in our catches or landings. Thirdly, 200 to 300 jobs have been lost from a work force of about 2,500.

[Mr. Eddie McGrady]

I can conclude only that Northern Ireland has made a substantial, more proportional, contribution to fishing conservation in the Irish sea than anyone else. That was confirmed when, as the hon. Member for North Antrim said, we visited Brussels in the past couple of weeks, but we could still be penalised because Brussels alleges—I want the Minister to comment on this—that the United Kingdom as a whole has not fulfilled its obligations on conservation. Because Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, it will be further penalised in the forthcoming multi-annual guidance programme IV. We will suffer disproportionately yet again, despite the fact that we have fulfilled our conservation commitment. That point needs to be made very clearly.

We were also alarmed by the proposals under Lassen for a further 40 per cent. reduction in fishing effort—a 40 per cent. reduction of a 70 per cent. remnant of the fleet of Northern Ireland. That would be devastating. There comes a point when fishing effort at sea—which, of course, supports the onshore process involving factories and jobs—simply collapses. If there are not sufficient catches coming ashore, the whole industry, both at sea and ashore, will collapse like a pack of cards.

The Lassen report has been scorned and opposed by all participating Governments, but it is the only report on the table. There is no other proposal. All the others are in the air, and we must be very careful, because Commissioner Bonino is very enamoured of it.

The quota restrictions that we think will be imposed are frightening for the Northern Ireland fishing industry. Whiting, plaice, herring and haddock have been placed in the same category. I shall deal with one of the species to illustrate our problem with all the quotas. In 1997, the Irish sea whiting total allowable catch will suffer its greatest reduction, from 9,000 tonnes in 1996. The scientific community recommended a TAC of 7,500 tonnes, but the Commission has now proposed one of 6,400—a cut of 29 per cent. We simply cannot withstand such a cut. We also do not understand it. All the signs indicate that, in 1997, the potential is good for whiting fishing.

On Irish sea whiting, the ICES scientists report stated:

"Whiting is taken mainly as a by-catch in mixed species otter trawl fisheries . . . The stock is considered to be within safe biological limits."

An interesting comparison can be made on the basis of two quotations in the same report, one on whiting in the Irish sea, the other on whiting off the west of Scotland. On the latter area, the report states:

"Whiting is mainly taken as a mixed fishery"

and

"ICES considers the stock to be within safe biological limits."

There is not a great deal of difference between the quotations about fish stocks in the different areas, yet a reduction of 2,600 tonnes has been recommended for Irish sea whiting, whereas an increase of 2,000 tonnes has been recommended for the west of Scotland.

Can someone explain that paradox? I hope that the Minister will take the point on board. I can run down the list—on whiting, haddock and herring, for example—and find similar contradictions. The cod regime will not be greatly diminished, yet we know from larval surveys that there are now three times as many cod in the Irish sea as there have been in recent years.

I was interested that the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) dealt with the unique problems faced by the Northern Ireland fishing industry. We should remember that it is a fishing industry with three ports that are very close together. It uses a common fishing ground—which is at the confluence of the two tides, north and south—that comprises a specific ecological, fishing and breeding ground. It has a speciality of its own, which, as late as 1992, was mentioned in a paper issued by the Commission.

The Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East mentioned the Hague preference. They drew certain conclusions, but they did not go far enough or draw the conclusion that I thought they could have drawn: Northern Ireland should be a top priority fishing region. There is nothing new about that conclusion. In all structural and social funds, the Northern Ireland region has a special connotation—category I. Why cannot that connotation be applied to the fishing industry? If we extrapolate the comments of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in today's statement on BSE, he was saying—or at least he was hinting at it; perhaps, once we examine the small print, it was only vote-catching for tonight's Division and not a reality—or insinuating that Northern Ireland will be a special region in relation to BSE and to lifting the ban, because it has fulfilled the Florence conditions.

Northern Ireland has a specific, coastal-fishing fishing industry. It forms a specific sector, and it has specific fishing grounds. In his speech today, the Minister said that different waters require different conservation measures. I shall take him at his word and ask him to apply other considerations to conservation measures in the Northern Irish fishing industry.

If I am still within my time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to deal with the issue of the Hague preference vis-à-vis the Republic of Ireland. Hon. Members' comments on that matter in today's debate have been correct. There is a surplus in the Republic of Ireland's quota for some species under the Hague preference, whereas there is a shortfall in the UK's allocation in Northern Ireland waters. Over the years, there has been a unilateral arrangement by which the adverse effects of the Hague preference have been diminished and alleviated by the Republic of Ireland swapping its surplus to meet the requirements of the Northern Ireland fishing industry.

I think that that arrangement should operate on a more regulated basis, rather than using the ad hoc-ery of past years. I ask the Minister to raise that issue with his counterpart in the Republic of Ireland, and to conduct a small re-arrangement of the Hague preference to alleviate its adverse effects on Northern Ireland.

Despite the assurances given to us today that the Minister is going hell for leather against the Hague preference, he told me recently—in a letter of 12 December 1996—that it was not in the interests of the United Kingdom fishing industry to deal with the Hague preference now. That is a very different message from that which he gave the House today.

8.36 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): In his opening speech, my hon. Friend the Minister said that I had expressed my concerns about the six and 12-mile limits. Although that is true, I should tell the House that those concerns pale into insignificance compared with my concern about the regime that we are now debating. There is no doubt that the common fisheries regime is both evil and corrupting. It is evil because of its devastating effect on the marine environment; it is corrupting because, among other things, it obliges otherwise honest men to become criminals.

That fact is well demonstrated by the words spoken in court by a Shetland fisherman, as reported in the *Fishing News* of 13 December 1996. He said:

"We can't help what we catch . . . I had dumped 400 boxes of saithe . . . Who has committed the biggest crime—me, who landed 25 boxes, or a system which made me dump 400 boxes?"

That is why I say that the regime is totally unacceptable.

The problem of discards and quotas is well known; perhaps less well known is the amount of fish that is destroyed onshore. In Peterhead harbour in June, and in Scalloway harbour in the Shetlands in August, colleagues and I saw prime fresh fish covered with red paint which was to be destroyed because it did not fetch the minimum landing price decreed by the European Community. How can we possibly claim that such policies—all of which were introduced in the name of conservation—are having their intended effect when thousands upon thousands of tonnes of fish are dumped at sea and when prime fresh fish is being destroyed ashore?

The common fisheries policy is not a practical policy. On the contrary, it is a political policy in which a vital British national interest is subjugated in the quest for European hegemony. It offends against common sense; it lacks credibility and any notion of morality; and its only principle—that of European integration—is one that I and thousands of fishermen cannot possibly support.

The principle that I do support is that of defending a vital national interest. I respectfully suggest that the Government should not talk about national interests unless they are prepared to defend them, which they are at present failing to do in British waters around Guernsey where the perception is that the United Kingdom has not deployed the Royal Navy for fear of upsetting the French.

I met Guernsey fishermen in the Palace of Westminster last Thursday. They complained of harassment, intimidation, blackmail and of being set up for prosecution, all of which the Government have apparently not seen fit to counter. My hon. Friend the Minister has repeatedly stated that the six and 12-mile limits are not negotiable. Will he therefore tell the House why armed French naval vessels of the Affaires Maritimes have sailed into the six to 12-mile limits off Guernsey in support of French fishing vessels?

I deal now with some other aspects of the common fisheries policy. The House must not portray Jacques Santer, Emma Bonino and the other Commissioners as bogeymen and women; we should see them for what they are—Commissioners of the European Union, spelling out, often with disarming honesty and clarity, what we in the United Kingdom have already signed up to in three solemn and binding treaties leading inexorably to European integration.

I should like to say a word or two about fishing permits. In answer to a parliamentary question, my hon. Friend the Minister said:

"Council regulations 3760/92 and 1627/94 provide the framework for the Community's licensing and permit systems to enable member states to regulate fishing activities . . . They do not entail a European fleet run from Brussels."—[*Official Report*, 11 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 73.]

I have just two points to make about that. First, the permits represent days at sea by another name. Secondly, they are aspects of European policy, and while member states may administer them, they will do so only as the designated agent of the central authority in Brussels. As I shall show in a moment, neither the UK nor any other member state of the European Community has competence in these matters.

I do not argue with the basic premise of permits. If one accepts the principle of a common fisheries policy, a permit system is entirely logical, but neither I nor a substantial—and growing—number of people in the fishing industry any longer want a common fisheries policy. I support the aims and objectives of the Save Britain's Fish campaign. I support the repatriation of powers and the establishment of a 200-mile exclusive fishing zone for this country.

The common fisheries policy is fundamentally flawed and quite incapable of sensible reform. On that point, we should perhaps remind ourselves of the words of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade. In a press release dated February 1995, he said:

"There is no prospect of a unanimous agreement among the 15 Member States to amend the Treaties which provide the legal basis of the CFP . . . The fact is that the UK has accepted, by Treaty, that Fisheries lie within the competence of the European Community".

The principle of equal access and the prospect of the permit system is wholly unacceptable both to this nation, which recognises it as a loss of sovereignty, and to the fishing industry, which sees it as a sell-out of British waters and as a giving away of the substantial fish stocks in them, not to mention the livelihood of British fishermen.

As for the immediate import of this debate, we shall soon vote on these important issues. I repeat now what I have said on previous occasions: this vote, whether the Government win or lose, will not change one jot or tittle of the common fisheries policy. It is quite bogus and, to use the phrase of my hon. Friend the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body), it is humbug for the Opposition parties to pretend that they have grounds for opposing the Government tonight.

When I intervened on him, the Opposition spokesman confirmed what we have long known—that the Labour party is committed to the common fisheries policy. It is committed to the principle of equal access to the common resource. Unless it changes its mind on that question, it has no locus to criticise or vote against what the Government are trying to do. The reality is that even if Labour were to form the Government tomorrow, it would still be bound by the common fisheries policy.

To conclude, I remind hon. Members of the extent of the House's power over fisheries policy. In a letter dated 19 June 1996, J. Almeida Serra of the Fisheries Directorate General XIV, said:

"Member States have transferred exclusive competence to the community with regard to the conservation and management of living marine resources. This competence applies in regard to waters under national fisheries jurisdiction and to the high seas."

[Mr. Christopher Gill]

I say again that it is bogus for the Opposition parties to pretend that they could have any policy other than the common fisheries policy unless and until that policy is scrapped.

8.46 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): If the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) will forgive me, I have to say that it is his argument that is bogus and humbug. He made a case for not supporting the Labour party's amendment; he most certainly does not have an argument for supporting the Government, which is what he said he was going to do.

People in the fishing industry will hear that the Eurosceptics, who say that they support the industry, are now going to support the Government. Those people will cast their minds back to the voting behaviour of some of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues during the days-at-sea controversy, for example, where again those hon. Members' support for the fishing industry and opposition to the Government were found wanting. The hon. Member for Ludlow may quarrel with the Labour party, with me and with the Liberal party, but according to the argument that he has advanced he does not have a shred of credibility if he is not prepared to oppose the Government.

The Minister said that he disliked the Scottish National party. I am afraid that that does not cause me any anxiety whatsoever. I have to tell him that the fishing industry dislikes the Government. It dislikes the Government not because of the 10-point plan that the Minister has introduced, but because of the past 10 years of inaction and failure to defend the industry's interests. The broken water of the do-nothing years, as one of the fishing industry's leaders so memorably put it only a while ago, is the reason why the fishing industry does not trust the Government.

There is no doubt that the Labour party's amendment is flawed, but it has the virtue of going over the record of the past 17 years and detailing some of the failures, the betrayals and the sell-outs in which the Government have engaged vis-à-vis the fishing industry. It would be enormously helpful if the Labour party would discuss its amendment with the other six Opposition parties, all of which have an interest in the fishing industry. It would not only be useful for the Labour party to show some humility in recognising that every Opposition party vote is necessary to defeat the Government, but the combined wisdom of the Social Democratic and Labour party, the Unionist parties, the Liberals and the Scottish National party might improve Labour's amendment. Judging from its document charting the road to the manifesto, which does not mention the subject, the Labour party's commitment to the fishing industry is minimal. Nevertheless, the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru will support the Labour amendment and, if it comes to a vote, will oppose the Government motion as an indictment of the Government's track record on the industry.

I want to raise three specific fishing issues with the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland before turning to some more general points. First, I reinforce the point made about sprat by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). There is a difficulty with the by-catch in the pelagic sector. I hope that the Minister will deal with that when he sums up.

Secondly, on the haddock quota on the west coast and in the North sea, it is vital to contest the argument that because the area is a mixed fishery, if there is a decline in the cod quota, the haddock quota must also decline. We can still have a clean fishery for haddock in a mixed fishery. On the west coast, cod fishing takes place in February, March and April and not in the rest of the year. It does not follow that haddock and cod quotas should go down in sequence. I hope that the Minister will assure us that he will devote the same amount of energy to the haddock quota in the North sea as was devoted to the plaice quota last year and that the decline of the haddock quota on the west coast will be visited before the final decisions are made.

Thirdly, I want to raise the issue of the Hague preference. I want at least one voice this evening to speak in support of the Hague preference, which is important for the Scottish industry. I hope that that will be acknowledged by the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland when he sums up. The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who introduced the debate, told us that all the fishing representatives had agreed that the Hague preference should be reconsidered. I consulted the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and found that it had not agreed; it had just been told that the issue would be reconsidered. The Minister then told us that the representatives had not agreed, but they had not objected when he had told them. He then told us—the record will confirm this—that there were differing views across the United Kingdom.

As a Member of Parliament representing Scottish fishermen, I shall obviously defend the Hague preference because it has played an important role in defending the Scottish fishing industry, particularly the haddock quota. However, one point about the Hague preference should not go unsaid. Negotiated in the mid-1970s by Garret Fitzgerald, then Irish Foreign Minister, it is the one part of the common fisheries policy that relates to fishing dependency. It may do that imperfectly, but that is a valuable principle to defend. Apart from the point that Ireland's great success in formulating and defending the Hague preference shows how a small nation in Europe can gain results by making one issue a priority, the Hague preference is worth defending in principle. I have a little advice for Labour Front Benchers. Perhaps they should address the concerns of hon. Members from Northern Ireland by saying that their interests will be defended in the swaps arrangements and that, unlike last year, the commitments will be delivered this year, whatever party is in power.

I come now to the issues at the heart of the problems with the common fisheries policy. I remind the fisheries Minister who opened the debate that I have been criticising the common fisheries policy since long before he became the Minister responsible for fisheries. Having seen fisheries Ministers come and go with depressing regularity, I fully expect to be criticising it long after he has stopped being the Minister.

The Government wonder why I doubt their commitment on flags of convenience. It is partly because of their record. Back in 1988, the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) and I argued in Committee on the Merchant Shipping Bill that the Government's measures were likely to fail in the European Court and we put forward an alternative proposal for residential requirements for the crews of such vessels.

The Government told us that such a measure was silly and unnecessary. It was clearly not unnecessary and a residential requirement on the crew would have been more logical than imposing a language requirement, which seems to be the Minister's latest idea.

My real concern about flags of convenience vessels relates to the Government's recent record. I refer to the challenge made by my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) to the President of the Board of Trade on 12 November, when he made a statement on the Government's objections to the 48-hour directive. My hon. Friend said:

"Despite its flexibility, the time scale for implementation and the existing derogations, will that issue now take priority over discussions about matters such as the common fisheries policy . . . ?"

The President of the Board of Trade replied:

"There are other important issues to be addressed at the intergovernmental conference, but it is this issue"—

the 48-hour directive—

"that matters to the Government and we intend to insist upon it."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 163.]

I do not think that it is unfair for me to ask the Government what would happen if agreement were reached on flags of convenience vessels but not on the 48-hour directive. Would the Government block their own achievement on fishing in pursuit of their opposition to the 48-hour directive? As the Amsterdam summit comes conveniently after the general election, the question can also be addressed to those on the Labour Front Bench. Presumably they can apply their minds directly to flags of convenience vessels because they do not oppose the 48-hour directive. After so many years of betrayal, we are entitled to ask about the priority being given to this long-running sore for the fishing industry.

My second issue is relative stability. That is the rock on which the common fisheries policy becomes tolerable or intolerable. Many of us had our confidence in the future of the policy severely damaged when the Government—together with other Governments—conceded early access to western waters for the Spanish. That was a staggering achievement by the Spanish. They had to revisit and reinterpret their treaty of accession, achieve unanimity across all member states and win legal opinion. Having started with indefensible arguments, the Spanish managed to achieve early access against all the odds because they had it as a top priority.

The European Parliament fisheries committee elected as its rapporteur Ms Carmen Fraga Estevez—a Spanish Member of the European Parliament who is known to be a hard-line supporter of free access to all fisheries. That is depressing for the future of the policy. The House may be interested to learn that the British Conservatives in the European Parliament were among her sponsors for that post: they put forward a hard-line Spanish federalist as rapporteur for that crucial fisheries committee. It is little wonder the fishing industry has scant confidence in many of the Conservative party's statements.

My last general point is on low quotas. More than any other issue, the idiocy of having to throw back dead into the sea perfectly good fish has undermined confidence on the quayside in the common fisheries policy. At a certain point, the low quota policy starts to work in a perverse direction.

The ideas that have come from the industry of a tax on industrial fishing and technical measures to defend the industry have not been pursued with the urgency that is required. The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland may frown—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): What tripe!

Mr. Salmond: Tripe, is it? I saw more action after the Government's defeat last year in the fisheries debate than I had seen in my previous eight years in the House. Nothing has concentrated the Government's mind more wonderfully than being defeated in the House last year. We have had 30 points from the fisheries review group and a 10-point plan from the Minister. Why? Fishing has at last become a key political issue because the Government know that they face defeat in the Chamber. It is the prospect of defeat that has concentrated the Government's mind. It is the prospect of defeat that has stopped fishing being traded off, as it has so often been before, in pursuit of other objectives.

The Under-Secretary of State for Scotland will pardon us if, as Members who represent fishing constituencies, we look for a time when it will not require the imminence of political defeat in the House of Commons to concentrate the Government's mind on the fishing industry. We want a Government who concentrate on fishing full time, all the time. In my opinion, that means a Scottish Government.

8.59 pm

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): Every year, we have this pre-quota debate on fisheries, and every year we face huge cuts in the quota, the fleet or both. Every year the Minister, like his predecessors, goes off to Europe and returns waving a piece of paper and saying, "The cuts are less than first thought: that must be a triumph." Every year, in spite of and because of this ritual, the fleet gets smaller and the job gets harder.

Visitors to Lowestoft fish market are often shocked at the low level of activity when they have heard from people who recall walking from deck to deck across the harbour not so many years ago. The fishing boats were wedged in because there were so many of them. Anyone who looks at what is happening is shocked. Even those of us who have watched it happening are shocked at what has been done. The industry has not been calling wolf all these years. The warnings have been sounded and now we really are at the point of no return in so many aspects of fishing.

It is bad enough that coastal communities are being devastated, but the biggest tragedy of all is that fishing, managed properly, is a renewable resource. If gas, oil or coal is harvested to extinction, that is it and everybody understands that, but if fishing is wiped out, it is a failure of the regime that regulates it. The CFP and all that is done in its name is that regime. It is a monument to the nightmare world of bureaucracy where, in pursuit of a misguided ideal of a common European policy for something as diverse and varied as the whole European fishery, a British industry is in danger of being sacrificed. Everything comes back to that policy.

If cuts and restrictions to save the industry were being presented now as a make-or-break deal, the industry would accept them. It might have accepted this year's

[Mr. David Porter]

proposed cuts—for example, 48 per cent. in North sea sole against the background of the best sole fishery in living memory. However, cuts happen every year; there are more cuts every year because the previous year's cuts have failed.

I am encouraged—vindicated even—to find that no one now defends the CFP, although not enough people are yet arguing for our removal from it. As has been said, and as needs to be said again and again, the CFP is flawed from top to bottom. There is no incentive in it to conserve and manage the renewable resource because any savings in catch effort go back into the pool for the greedy Mediterranean fishermen to grab. There is the added problem in terms of conservation, which was mentioned earlier, of discarding dead fish over and above quota. Can there be a more bizarre, crazy and ludicrous political idea than the CFP, which does the precise opposite of what is intended?

Every year, more and more people are waking up to this madness. As the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) has said, fishing has risen up the political agenda. This year, the Government have given almost a full day to the debate, which is very welcome. Every year, the media get into a frenzy about the chances of the Government being defeated. Last year, the Government were defeated; I abstained on that occasion, although I had voted against the Government previously.

The point is that defeat made no difference. The Minister still went off to Europe, still spent a weekend arguing with our alleged partners and still came back with permission to catch fewer British fish than before. If the Government are defeated tonight, it will again make no difference at all. The Minister will still go off and the 1997 quotas will still be set. Tonight I shall vote with the Government: the time to vote against is afterwards, when the Minister comes back with a deal that is too poor to accept.

Furthermore—[*Interruption.*] Labour Front-Bench Members laugh. Furthermore, to vote against the Government means voting with the Opposition, and their views on fisheries policy are muddled at best, as we heard from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang). I cannot stomach voting tonight with a party that has said that it will never be isolated in Europe and whose leader has ruled out leaving the CFP.

In addition, my hon. Friend the Minister has made a lot of the right noises. He has visited and made himself available to the industry around the country. He has understood the essential problems of trying to run an industry by agreement with other countries whose market tastes, cultural attitudes to rules and political agendas are all totally alien to ours.

The Minister has talked about and promised action on quota hoppers and he is looking at the regional management of separate waters. A dose of benefit of the doubt is due in the Division Lobby tonight. However, the Minister knows, as we all know, that talk of the reform of the CFP and of there being no IGC agreement until details such as quota hoppers and flagship piracy are sorted may be a further part of the con.

The future after the year 2002 is surely already settled. The treaties and regulations now in place and those that will be enforced if no new deals are stitched up in or before 2002 can be amended only by unanimous agreement. Only a fool would pretend that some European Union member states will vote away their only justification for access to our waters. Even under qualified majority voting, they can hold us to a policy which, increasingly, is in their interests.

If and when more countries enter the bizarre lunacy of the European Union for no other reason than that they will get something out of it at our expense, our position will become worse. We shall have little or no fishing grounds as large fleets are allowed access in return for a slice of equal access to the common resource, which appears to be open to every Tom, Dick and Harry except, of course, the British.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) referred to the European Union special fishing permit. It is based on the 1976 article setting out the CFP, which introduced the repulsive Soviet-style principle of equal access to a common resource. It gives Brussels ultimate power to control numbers of vessels, fishing times, catches and mesh and gear sizes and types. It also sets out fines, including seizure and withdrawal of permits.

The Commission tried to introduce the permit system during the negotiations on Spanish accession to the EU, but it was opposed. When Finland and Sweden joined, they were obliged to sign a treaty to the effect that access arrangements would apply for a transitional period ending by the date of implementation of the Community fishing permit system—not later than 31 December 2002. Treaties must be agreed unanimously, so all Governments of member states knew about the permit system and agreed to it. That leads me to ask whether talk of reform is a cover and whether a single Brussels-controlled fleet has not already been agreed for 2002 or 2003.

I wish my hon. Friend the Minister luck at the Council of Ministers meeting. Let him go to Europe and argue for the British fishing industry, which he knows is in a bad way. Let him go, knowing that that industry could have a bright future with good, lasting jobs and a steady supply of wholesome food. However, if he cuts the quotas or reduces the fleet at Lowestoft any further through the ludicrous decommissioning scheme, which compensates boat owners but not those who are put on the dole when the boats are scrapped, or if the cuts are greater than those of previous years, there will be no fishing left. At Lowestoft, a 40 per cent. cut could mean a 100 per cent. cut because the remaining 60 per cent. would not be viable.

If my hon. Friend has to come back with a deal that includes cuts, he should not come back. If he has to sell us out to get a deal, he should not come back. Our European partners need us more than we need them. We are answerable to the people of the United Kingdom and not the European Union.

9.6 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): When I first saw today's Order Paper, I was greatly cheered. We all thought that we would have a full day's debate, but when we arrived here, we realised that there were two long statements. No less than one hour and 55 minutes disappeared, so we have ended up with little more than the half day that we had last year for one of the most important debates of the year on a topic that is vital to the welfare of fishing communities throughout the

United Kingdom. That is not acceptable. We really need a full day's debate, so that those of us who speak at the tail end of the debate can expand on the issues before us. We all have problems to relate, and if the debate were longer, no doubt other hon. Members would contribute to it.

Reference has been made to quota hopping. When we first entered the quota system, I wonder why nobody had the wit to ring-fence fish quotas in the same way as we ring-fence milk quotas and sheep quotas—which are distributed among the four countries of the United Kingdom and, for sheep, between lowland and upland flocks. If that had been done, we would not be facing the current problems with quota hopping. We are in our current predicament simply because there was not enough forethought when we put our name to the policy in the past.

When I examine the position in Northern Ireland, I am absolutely astonished to find that the Northern Ireland quota has reduced while that of the Irish Republic has increased. In last year's debate, the Minister said:

"I assure hon. Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies that I shall be pressing the Fisheries Council for increases in the quotas proposed for the Irish sea. We fully appreciate the concerns of the Northern Irish industry about the Hague preference and of course we shall continue to seek to reduce the disadvantage to Northern Ireland resulting from the Hague preference"—

which, of course, has the opposite effect on Scotland—

"by carrying out international quota swaps."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 1995; Vol. 268, c. 1398-99.]

However, that never materialised.

I was told by the Minister in a letter on 12 December:

"These frustrations arise not because of the action by the UK in applying Hague Preference, but because of the approach taken by the Republic and I will be taking this up again with the Irish Minister at the December Fisheries Council."

I hope that he will take it up with a great deal more success this year than was the case last year, when we got nowt, which was not much help to the fishermen in Northern Ireland.

We are all disappointed that the swaps that the Minister promised last year did not materialise. Towards the end of the fishing season, we pretty well ran out of whiting. Some were eventually procured from elsewhere, but that had more to do with good fortune than with Government action.

Although I welcome the Minister's remarks today about the Hague preference and revisiting, more needs to be done than that. Inequities must be resolved, but not at the expense of Scottish fishermen. Many communities in Scotland depend on fishing and would disappear if it is not kept up to scratch. Similarly, there are communities in Northern Ireland that are entirely dependent on fishing. We must realise that there is no alternative for those folk.

It would be a great blessing and enlightenment to us all if the Hague preference was published, as well as the appendices to it which, I believe, were never signed. We should all like to read them and see what we signed up to, or put our hand to.

The fish stocks of cod, herring, whiting and haddock in the Irish sea are in good shape or better. In the case of cod, there has been a reduction in fishing effort, which might account for the decrease in landings. Herring and whiting stocks seem to fishermen to be adequate; fishermen and scientists are often at variance. Whiting stocks, like those in the west of Scotland, are combined with other fish. Many of us cannot understand why that should be so. They should be treated as a distinct fishery, which they are.

At one time, haddock were scarce in the Irish sea. There is now a haddock stock off the coast of Down, and there is evidence that they are spawning there. I hope that that reflects the attitude of the Northern Ireland fishermen towards conservation, and the gear that they use. Those fish, however, are not being caught; we are not allowed to catch them, because area VIIa of the Irish sea is part of the larger area VII, which extends far beyond the confines of the Irish sea. Although haddock are scarce in the overall area, they are locally abundant. Surely it is time that we considered carefully a more localised fishing policy to deal with the changes over the years in the abundance or scarcity of particular species of fish.

Scientists often seem to get matters wrong. Would it not be a good idea for them to go out on the fishing boats, so that they could see what the fishermen are catching, and whether fish are abundant or scarce, rather than the scientists being taken round once or twice a year to take quick samples here and there? In theory, that could be accurate, but to be sure of accuracy, scientists should make many more stops than they can under the present system. If they were out on the boats, as they used to be, we would have a more accurate idea of stocks.

There is one topic concerning fishermen that has not been mentioned: the way in which the jobseeker's allowance impacts on fishermen. I hope that the Minister will take up the matter with the Secretary of State for Social Security. The JSA is not designed for the fishermen's life style. The scheme is for people who are out of work, but fishermen are not out of work. Their work is simply intermittent, and their working days are not foreseeable. When they go into the local office to make a claim, they are told that they can have an appointment in a couple of weeks' time. In two weeks' time, they might be fishing and they cannot go. It is an important matter, and I hope that the Minister will undertake to do something about it.

We have heard much about the Government's demerits. We have heard remarkably little about the Opposition's policy, and rather more about their hopes. As the real debate will take place in a month or six weeks, it might be as well to see the outcome of that before we make up our mind on our attitude to the Government.

9.14 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): In view of the shortness of time, I thought that I would have to resort to the formula of saying that I would not be able to follow what the Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) said and the way in which he said it, but he touched on the Opposition's policy, and, as they were unable to say anything about it, it seemed only fair, in the spirit of bipartisanship, to comment on it, and perhaps help out the hon. Gentleman.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House have either sparingly deposited or positively heaped praised on my hon. Friend the Minister of State, for the way in which he has performed over the past year, which is entirely right. What he has achieved has been quite remarkable. I have certainly noticed a difference in the perception and understanding of fishermen who have spoken to me of what the Government are trying to do for them.

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

The unhappiness that always underpins fisheries debates underpins the debate again today. The problem is that the Minister can swim only in the water in which he finds himself. The water in which he is swimming at the moment is that of the common fisheries policy. At first sight, it is easy to say that the CFP is dreadful, we should get out of it and some other policy out there would be so much better. I do not think that that is easy to say. The CFP is only a symptom of something that is very bad indeed; it is telling us something about the European Community's very nature.

It is all too easy to deride people with views such as mine and say, "Hang on a second. What you are really talking about is withdrawing from the European Community." I am proposing no such thing. There is no question of our being able to withdraw from Europe—a million war dead from two world wars testify to the fact that the fate of the Government and the country is inextricably tied up with Europe. The argument is about not whether we pull out of Europe, but the terms on which we participate in Europe.

Among other things, the debate illustrates that, after 25 years in Europe on the terms that we have had—and have—in Europe, we must ask ourselves whether they are the right terms for our continuing participation in Europe. It seems to me that they are not. One has only to look at the CFP and the circumstances in which the Minister must try to defend British interests to know that this business of the European Union as it is now constructed simply cannot go on. I hope that one day—not tonight, but perhaps some time in the not too distant future—the British Government will say to the EU, "You have aspirations about your destiny and a desire for political union and federation that make perfect and honourable sense, given your history, but they are not for us."

We have to find a relationship with Europe that makes us good Europeans—I perhaps speak just for myself—instead of bad Europeans. We cannot for ever keep on asking our so-called partners in Europe to do things our way when, universally, they want to do things their way. There will come a point when we shall have to ask our European partners, "What can we honestly and genuinely agree and co-operate on?" In my judgment, we shall agree on a trading arrangement, which will carry with it a number of features. Those features will include taking back our own destiny, making our own decisions, taking back our territorial waters and rejecting for ever the concept that, in some way, our resources are a common EU resource.

Although I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench on their excellent attitude over the past year and although I have been heartened by what they have said about quota hopping, to which I shall return, I have to strike a sombre note. There is a limit to what they can do in Europe with a common fisheries policy while we are hobbled to the EU in such a way.

If time allowed, I would go through all the aspects that have been raised by my local fishing people throughout the year and set out what they would ideally like. In order that my hon. Friend the Minister takes note, I should simply mention that the total allowable catch of monkfish is of particular concern in the west country.

On quota hopping, one has only to look at the figures supplied by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations to realise what an outrage is being perpetrated on fishing people at the moment. The Dutch hold 44 per cent. of the UK's plaice quota and 20 per cent. of the UK's sole quota. The Spanish—for crying out loud—hold 46 per cent. of the UK's hake quota, 35 per cent. of our megrim quota and 29 per cent. of our monkfish quota. Those figures, and the situations that they represent, must stop.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Does my hon. Friend, who is my neighbour in Devon, agree that quota hopping is precisely the issue at the heart of all the complaints that we receive from fishermen in the south-west? Does he also agree that that has been recognised by the Government in their refusal to sign any further Maastricht treaty without having reached an accommodation on that crucial issue?

Mr. Nicholls: My hon. Friend is right. He is saying on the Floor of the House precisely what he and I have said to each other and on delegations to Ministers over many years. Quota hopping is the key point in the unsatisfactory nature of the current situation. Because we are locked into the European Union, to get some reform, we shall have to threaten to shake down the temple. That is essentially what Ministers are saying that they intend to do.

Inevitably, some people outside will say that politics is a matter of choice. Many people think that politics is a choice between the bad and the frightful; obviously I do not accept that. There must be people who are concerned about the fishing industry and have been watching this debate who have said, "What's on offer? There's going to be an election soon. Perhaps we should have a look at the other parties' policies."

It is completely in a spirit of friendship that I say to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) that his speech was truly frightful. I am glad that he has come back so as not to miss the words of praise that I am about to heap on him.

The hon. Gentleman's speech was frightful, not because he lacks forensic debating skills—I know from our past exchanges that he is endowed with those—but because he is too honest. It was impossible for him, with the brief that he had, to make a fist of supporting the proposition that the Labour party had anything constructive to say about its policy. Over and over again, he failed to talk about policy. Perfectly correctly, he refused to give way to me when I wanted to chide him about some of what he had said about Labour party policy in the past. He did not want to know, and he was perfectly right.

At one point, a look of horror spread over the hon. Gentleman's face and he asked what the Government were doing in 1991 and 1992. In 1992, the hon. Gentleman was fighting on a Labour manifesto that contained not a single word about the fishing industry. Not long afterwards, the European elections were fought. What did the Labour party say about fishing then? Absolutely nothing.

To be fair, even the Labour party can learn. It has now published a document called, "New Labour, New Life for Britain", which contains a statement about fish: it is one word shorter than the title of the document. It is no wonder that the hon. Gentleman did not want to give way

on his policy, because he does not have one that he can honestly state and, being the decent chap that he is, he was not prepared to pretend that he had.

The reality is that the hon. Gentleman is wedded hook, line and sinker to the common fisheries policy because he is a federalist. I do not know whether he genuinely believes in that and feels more comfortable as an arch-federalist in an arch-federalist party than he did in all the previous general elections that he fought as someone who wanted to come out of the Community, but the fact is that he is hooked, because Labour is in favour of a federal Europe, and policies such as the common fisheries policy are the inevitable consequence of that.

To try to attract people to the prospect of voting Labour because it might have a good fisheries policy, all that the hon. Gentleman can say is that he will put up with the status quo, that he will never be isolated in Europe and that he will abandon the veto. That is the sum total of the Labour party's policy on fishing. To put it as kindly as one can, that is not an attractive prospect.

The Liberal party will have a policy for every season. I tried to find out what the Liberal policy on fishing was. I was none the wiser for listening to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace).

Mr. Wallace: It is in our document.

Mr. Nicholls: It is impressive to learn that the hon. Gentleman went away to find out for himself what Liberal policy was. Apparently, the Liberal Democrats believe in establishing a European fishing fleet managed by EU regional executives. That will terrify our partners in Europe about the desire and intent of the Liberal party to—

Mr. Wallace: Rubbish.

Mr. Nicholls: It is rubbish, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for being prepared to admit that fact. What could one expect? The Liberal party does not have many principles that have not changed over the years, but the one principle of which it has always been in favour is a united states of Europe. After all, every Liberal parliamentary candidate will stick a commitment in his manifesto to the effect that, in any circumstances, the Liberals will opt for a European currency. What else on earth could one expect from a party that says that it has only one principle that matters to it—a united states of Europe? When a party has such a federalist agenda, it cannot possibly stand up for British fishermen.

What is the significance of tonight's vote? When our Ministers go to Europe to argue in the thoroughly unsatisfactory climate created by the common fisheries policy, it would be nice if they could argue with their opposite numbers and say, "Whatever else disunites us in the House of Commons, everyone is with us on this. We have certain irreducible demands." If the vote goes the wrong way, or, frankly, even if we win it narrowly, Ministers will be unable to say that. Out there, when my hon. Friends are negotiating with their opposite numbers in Europe, those European Ministers will have a sneaking suspicion that the Labour party does not have the resolve to stand up to them. They will say to themselves, "There is a general election coming along soon. Perhaps the Labour party will win. Well, we can see what the Labour party is like. It did not back the Government even on something such as this. We know that it will be a pushover." That is the problem we face.

It was put better than I can certainly put it by the *Western Morning News*, not a newspaper from which I am usually able to quote with approbation in the House. It is a stern critic, at times perhaps fairly so. It issued an editorial today under the heading, "Don't Sabotage Fishing Industry". It called for the industry to remain non-political and asked for unity in British interests. It said:

> "Defeat would send the wrong signals to European leaders on this crucial issue—and weaken John Major's hand in fighting for a better deal for our fishermen."

Ministers have said that they will stand up for the key issue that matters more than anything else to our fishing communities. They have said that they simply will not tolerate the continuance of the present practice of quota hopping. If we presented a united voice tonight, and if the Opposition said, "Whatever else disunites us, we will back the Government on this," what a marvellous bargaining position that would be for my hon. Friends. Instead, when my hon. Friends go to Europe next, they will be looking at their opposite numbers, who believe that a Labour victory is possible. They know that if that happens, they will have to do business with people who will ultimately sell this country's rights down the river. That is a pretty sombre prospect. That is why we should win the vote, and win the general election in six months' time.

9.26 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): It is time to get back to reality after the fantasy world presented by the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls).

It is true that this annual debate has had a higher profile in recent years than it had in the past. Of course that is not all to do with the fishing industry, but the narrow votes on the issue in the past couple of years have been far from damaging for the fishing industry. They have benefited it in all sorts of ways. The Minister offered us a grand tour of the fishing constituencies and uttered warm words about the Members who represent them. In fact, he uttered such words about Members who were not even here for the debate, including the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe).

In the past we have witnessed increases in decommissioning grants; the reinstatement of port improvement grants; and tonight we have been offered more promises of fish for the Ulster fishing fleets. It is not clear from the Minister's contribution, however, from where exactly the fish will come. Of course we are all delighted about an extra allocation for the Ulster fleets, or any other fleet, but we would appreciate some details about where those fish will come from and how the transfers will be made. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson), will deal with that when he replies to the debate, because I am sure that I am not the only person who is curious about it.

I should also like the hon. Gentleman to deal with the point raised by the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) and his hon. Friends about the Hague preference. Let me be absolutely straight and honest about

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

it—it is important to start how we intend to go on in our future relationship. Of course, as the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) said, it was introduced by a Labour Minister. At the time it was welcomed by the industry because it gave the United Kingdom fishing industry an extra allocation of fish as a fallback when quotas were being pressed. In that respect it provided the industry with a safety net.

I have consistently argued that the Hague preference has its disadvantages, and the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) may remember challenging me in Committee on this matter. At that time, I expressed concerns about the fact that the Hague preference operates against the interests of the Ulster fleet and some of the fleets from the east coast of England. As an hon. Member who represents a Humberside constituency, I understand the concerns of the Humber ports and the east coast fleet. But while recognising the disadvantages, the Labour party has always conceded that the Hague preference provides a safety net and we must look at the interests of the whole country. Having said that, we recognise that the calculations for the Hague preference are not working in the best interests of our country overall, and the Minister alluded to that. That is something that needs to be considered.

We have always argued in the past that, in terms of the quota round and TACs, the Minister should wherever possible argue for quotas that do not trigger the Hague preference because it can work against the Irish fleet. It can be a two-edged sword. In the longer term, we welcome the report from the working group on CFP reform, which has put forward some interesting arguments about more autonomy in coastal state management and regional management. That is very much in line with the approach that Labour has taken. We recognise the interests of the regions, and we aim to represent the interests of all the fleets and their own particular regional issues. We can look at that, but it must be debated in the context of the reform of the CFP.

The Government motion tonight is significant not for what it says, but for what it does not say. First, I wish to refer to the TAC details, some of which have been touched on in the debate. We have heard concerns about the details, and I know that the Minister is aware of the views of the industry on the matter. There is concern about the way in which the west coast cod and haddock quotas have been linked together to protect cod, as it is felt that the science—particularly on the west coast—is not as sound as it could be. I very much hope that the Minister will press the Commission on this point.

There has been a large cut in the whiting TAC in the Irish sea of 29 per cent. It seems difficult to justify a cut of that size, and I hope that the Minister will press that matter. There is a strong argument in favour of maintaining the North sea plaice TAC at the same level, and I am sure that the Minister is aware of that. There also has been a large cut in the sole quota, which will have severe effects on the fleet. We recognise that difficult decisions have to be made on the basis of good science, but I hope that that large cut can be justified.

Mr. Salmond: I do not wish to refer to the Hague preference, as the hon. Gentleman knows my views on it. Does he take on board the view of a number of Members of other parties that it would have been useful and constructive if the other six Opposition parties had seen the Labour amendment and had had an opportunity to contribute some ideas to it?

Mr. Morley: As a general principle, I believe in that, but the hon. Gentleman may not know that the Government did not table their motion until last Friday. Therefore, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) only had last Friday to formulate an amendment, which had to be tabled then for today's debate. It was not possible in that time to contact other parties, but it is something to bear in mind for the future.

I very much welcome the fact that the industry has questioned why there should not be a cut in the TAC for sprats. If there has been a cut in the TAC for herring, it follows that there is some logic in reducing the sprat quota. That is also linked with the argument about industrial fishing in the North sea—the one issue on which there has been almost unanimous agreement tonight. Along with Members from all parties, I attended the launch of a report supported by Unilever which identified the problems of the impact of industrial fishing on the biomass in the North sea, and on the relationship between sand-eels as a prey item for commercial fish and marine mammals and marine birds.

The Minister mentioned the possibility of TACs on sand-eels and that is welcome, but the provisional figures that I have seen suggest that those TACs would be very high indeed and I am not sure that they would significantly reduce the impact of industrial fishery. It would be more logical to follow the report's recommendation, which is closing certain areas to industrial fishing on a precautionary principle. I hope that the Minister will give sympathetic thought to that proposal.

Other quotas need careful examination and, in addition, there is the issue of so-called banking and borrowing, with which the Minister will be familiar. The United Kingdom and its fishing industry have a good record on quota utilisation and the provisions on banking and borrowing should be kept to a minimum.

Apart from the TAC-related concerns, the Council of Ministers still has unfinished business in respect of multi-annual guidance programme IV, which has been mentioned tonight. We have yet to hear the Government's response to the report of the common fisheries policy review group and it would be useful if the Minister were to indicate when the Government intend to reply to that report. I congratulate those involved in the group, because their report was useful and took forward the debate on fisheries management. The Minister touched on the issue of technical conservation and the Commission's proposals and I share some of the concerns that he expressed. Finally, one of the most divisive issues is that of flagships, and a constant theme in tonight's debate has been how that problem can be dealt with. We believe that we can approach many of those difficulties within the context of a European fisheries management framework.

I agree with the Minister's comments in respect of the Guernsey dispute—a dispute relating to a country that is not within the common fisheries policy, which needs to be resolved through bilateral negotiations and agreements. With my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) I met the Guernsey fishermen to discuss the

problem. The United Kingdom clearly has an interest and, although the Home Office is the lead Department in this matter, I hope that the Minister will look at the way in which the rules covering French territorial waters up to the 12-mile limit apply to the sort of trawlers that are banned from operating with the French 12-mile limit, but that are operating within the Guernsey island 12-mile limit. It does not seem unreasonable that the rules applicable in French waters should also apply within Guernsey waters.

Tonight's vote is not only about what is on the Order Paper, but about the fact that, for all the Government's fine words, nothing has been achieved on the flagship issue in the past 15 years. One attempt was made in 1988, but little has been done since. In terms of the motion, nothing has changed since last year—the Government have won no concessions on the flagship issue. I know that some hon. Members voted against last year's motion on a point of principle and I respect that, but there is no reason why they should turn around this year and embrace the motion tonight. Nothing has been gained for the industry and the same problems persist.

The Government have talked tough, but they talked tough about Spanish accession and that was conceded in the end. The hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) called on the Labour party to use the veto in the intergovernmental conference, but there are legitimate questions to be asked, such as whether protocol changes in the intergovernmental conference are the best or most appropriate way of dealing with the flagship issue. If it is possible to deal with the issue of flagships in the IGC, will the Minister tell us whether that will apply only to ships that come on to the register in future, or whether it can be made to apply retrospectively to those ships that are currently on the register? That is the pressing issue. Other member states may legitimately ask why, if the issue is so crucial to the UK, the Government did not make more of it when the common fisheries policy went through its mid-term review.

I give the hon. Member for Bridlington an undertaking. A future Labour Government will explore all appropriate ways—not only the IGC—to resolve the flagship issue and issues such as the six and 12-mile limits, which to us are non-negotiable, and more autonomy for coastal state nations within the CFP.

The hon. Member for Bridlington should not have had to ask, because no issue that we discussed tonight will be resolved until after the next general election. In that respect, all those problems are being left for a Labour Government to resolve. That is why, after 17 years, the Government are talking tough. It is easy to make all sorts of claims and promises before an election, knowing that those issues will not be dealt with. I know the underlying agenda.

A year from now, there will be a Labour Minister at the Dispatch Box and Conservative Members will be asking about those issues and drawing them to the Minister's attention. A year from now, I will remind them of that.

9.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): Tonight's debate was sometimes lively, sometimes thoughtful and sometimes very unthoughtful. It was made notable by the contributions and valedictory speeches on fisheries matters by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) and the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes). They both said that, next year, when the fisheries debate takes place, for the first time for many years neither of them will be here. I say on behalf of the House that the annual debate will be the poorer, because no one doubts their commitment to fighting their constituents' corner. I will be here next year, however, replying to the debate.

Regrettably, for the second year in succession, no member of the shadow Scottish Office team bothered to take part in the debate. This year, no member of the shadow Scottish Office team even signed the motion standing in the name of the official Opposition. We may draw two possible conclusions: either that the members of the team could not be bothered or that they do not agree with the motion tabled in the name of the Opposition and might join the Government in the Lobby tonight. Indeed, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), the shadow Scottish Secretary, did not even bother to attend the debate.

I hope to allay some of the fears that were expressed. We are all aware of the uncertainty of many fishermen about the future of their industry. Many of them feel threatened, for example by the growing interest of environmental bodies, by regulation from Brussels and by unfair competition. In the past year I have been at particular pains, therefore, to travel round Scotland to hear the industry's concerns at first hand. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Kynoch), have done likewise.

I hope that I have been able to act as an honest and accurate observer. I say that because, not only do I have the privilege of representing the considerable Scottish interest in the UK industry, but I have a personal interest because of the key role that fishing plays in my constituency.

When we focus on the problems of the sea fishing industry, we tend to forget that the industry remains viable and profitable. It continues to provide opportunities and rewards. The income of the whole fleet is up by 7 per cent. at a time when the Government have achieved historically low inflation, and that income has been shared among fewer boats.

If we are to safeguard that viability, we must acknowledge that the sea's natural resources are finite. The industry has changed significantly in recent years. The greater capacity of vessels to fish for longer periods, during the worst weather, over a greater sea area, using new electronic aids, means that we run the constant risk of taking too many fish out of the sea. If we put at risk the ability of some species to reproduce, we shall all be poorer.

In the debate, the Hague preference was mentioned by the hon. Members for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) and for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross), my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives and—repeatedly—by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). The EU has consistently recognised the need to sustain communities that depend heavily on fishing. That is why the system of Hague preferences allows the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland to secure a higher share of certain fish stocks when the total allowable

[Mr. Raymond S. Robertson]

catches fall below a certain threshold. By invoking the Hague preference, the UK can increase its share of selected quotas. For others, the UK needs to invoke the Hague preference to offset in part the impact of the Irish Republic's use of the Hague preference.

We recognise that it is unfortunate that the Hague preference mechanisms can work to the disadvantage of Northern Ireland fishermen as a result of the Irish Republic's use of them to gain extra quotas. That is why we have always made clear our readiness to engage in international swaps in order to help fishermen in the Province, recognising that they too are in an area of particular dependence.

We shall continue to invoke the Hague preference when it is in the United Kingdom's interest to do so, but we shall also seek to mitigate any disadvantage that Northern Ireland fishermen might suffer as a result of Irish invocation. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State said when he opened the debate, it is surely right, now that the United Kingdom is no longer a net beneficiary of the Hague preference, for us to review the whole system—away from this debate and away from the Council—early in the new year. At this morning's meeting, the industry accepted that.

Mr. Salmond: Given the new policy on the Hague preference that the Minister has enunciated this evening, can he give a guarantee that, as a result of any review, Scottish fishermen's entitlement will not be disadvantaged by the Government's new approach?

Mr. Robertson: Throughout the debate, the hon. Gentleman has displayed a singular lack of knowledge—indeed, complete ignorance—of what the Hague preference means. Throughout the debate, for his own party-political reasons, he has tried to put Scottish fishermen at the throats of Northern Ireland fishermen. When we invoke the Hague preference to the benefit of Scottish fishermen, in no way does it affect the Northern Ireland catch; only when the Republic invokes it is Northern Ireland affected.

The hon. Gentleman is making speeches all over Scotland comparing Scotland to the Republic, and saying that he would like Scotland to be another Republic of Ireland. We wondered what he meant by that, but now we know what he means: he wants to put Scottish fishermen at the throats of their Northern Ireland counterparts. That is not what the Hague preference is all about, and the hon. Gentleman should wake up to the reality.

The questions of the multi-annual guidance programme and quota-hopping have featured throughout the debate, and rightly so. Earlier this year, the Commission presented its proposals for a new set of medium-term targets to reduce fishing effort—the so-called MAGP. We expect to have a further discussion about those proposals in the Council later this week. While there should be no doubt that some further cut in fishing effort is necessary, the Commission's proposed cuts in fleet capacity go far beyond what member states consider reasonable or practical. Along with other member states, we have therefore been instrumental in pushing for the development of alternative approaches.

Let me repeat the assurances given earlier by my hon. Friend the Minister of State. What we are not prepared to do is run down the genuine United Kingdom fleet so that foreign interlopers can snap up UK quotas that are there for the benefit of our coastal communities. It cannot be right that vessels fishing against UK quotas, flying the Union flag, hardly ever land at UK ports.

Mr. Gill: Will my hon. Friend give the House a categorical assurance that, unless a satisfactory agreement is reached on quota-hopping, Her Majesty's Government will veto the proposed treaty at the intergovernmental conference?

Mr. Robertson: I think that I can best answer my hon. Friend by quoting from the interview given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary to the BBC's "On the Record" yesterday. My right hon. and learned Friend was asked:

"It is not a case of speculating, is it? We know that there are some things that you will insist on getting out of that."

He answered:

"That we have made absolutely clear. For example, we believe the social chapter should not be introduced by the back door—that is something on which the Prime Minister has made our position very clear; we have to look out for the interests of our fishing communities who have been gravely damaged by the way in which the quota-hopping phenomena have been distorted very much to our disadvantage. These are two clear examples which are fundamental to our objectives in the negotiation."

My right hon. and learned Friend was further asked:

"And there will be no deal unless they go along with us on those issues? That is absolutely clear, is it?"

He replied:

"Yes. We have made it very clear. At the end of the day, the intergovernmental conference reaches a successful conclusion when all the member states are content with the outcome. We have indicated we will not be satisfied with an outcome that does not address . . . the two points I have just raised."

I can give my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) the categorical assurance that he seeks. We have told our European partners that this is a totally unsatisfactory state of affairs.

We shall resolve the problem of quota hoppers and we proposed a solution at the intergovernmental conference. As I have said, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary made it clear over the weekend that the Government attach a high priority to that in the IGC. There can be no question of an agreement at Amsterdam without the issue of quota hoppers being addressed. In the mean time, we have made it crystal clear that we cannot contemplate imposing further compulsory fleet cuts on genuine UK fishermen. I give the House the absolute assurance that we remain firm in our resolve to tackle that problem.

My hon. Friends the Member for Holland with Boston (Sir R. Body) and for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) raised the issue of the six and 12-mile limits. I noted carefully their comments about our rights to inshore waters. I remind them that when my right hon. Friend the Minister opened the debate he said that we had made it clear that for us the six and 12-mile limits are and will remain non-negotiable and that any interference with those limits was unacceptable. He described them as an essential derogation from the equal access provisions of the common fisheries policy. That derogation was conceded in 1972 and it is our firm intention to establish those restrictions definitively. In that sense we would not be prepared to accept any move to end them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) inquired about the safety group. The Government attach great importance to safety, which is a matter for the Department of Transport's Marine Safety Agency. I understand that discussions about the future organisation of the group are still taking place and I hope that they will soon reach a satisfactory conclusion. I assure my hon. Friend that I shall make sure that his concerns are passed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

My hon. Friends the Member for Bridlington and for Ludlow asked what was happening off Guernsey. It has been suggested that in some way the Government have abandoned Guernsey and its fishermen to pursue wider interests with France. That is untrue and in some ways misrepresents the efforts that are being made by Guernsey, the Government and France to reach a long-term solution. Both Guernsey and France are committed to act in moderation and have stressed the importance of reducing tension in the area. I understand that that constructive approach prevails and I welcome that development. The Royal Navy has been close to the area in dispute during the past week, and I assure the House that Royal Navy protection vessels will continue on standby should circumstances require it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington raised the issue of discards. I think we all agree that discarding fish is a terrible waste. We are concerned about how to tackle the problem, and that is one of the main reasons for the Government's decision to set up the fisheries conservation group. We shall pursue the conclusions of the group in respect of a range of conservation measures.

The issue of total allowable catches and quotas rightly featured prominently in the debate. The setting of TACs and quotas is always contentious and fishermen rightly see them as among the main constraints on the freedom to fish. Some regard them as a necessary evil while others think that they are completely unnecessary. However, they are happy to see increases from one year to the next and understandably dismayed when scientists recommend prudent reductions.

I do not adhere to the rather gloomy view that a reduction in one or other TAC necessarily renders fishing uneconomic. In practice, when fish are in short supply price increases can compensate for a reduction in volume, although the position varies from fishery to fishery. For example, following cuts in their TACs, this year's prices for mackerel and herring increased sharply from about £200 to more than £600 a tonne for good quality mackerel. Later this week the Fisheries Council will meet in Brussels to set a TAC for next year for stocks that we share with other member states. I do not expect that to be straightforward.

There have been representations about particular TACs and I shall seek to adjust the Commissioner's proposals where that is justified. We have already signalled to our European partners the importance that we attach to securing a range of increases on the Commissioner's proposals for white fish TACs around our coastline as well as for Irish sea herring. I am keen to maintain pressure to reduce by-catches of juvenile herring in the North sea, not least by setting a responsible TAC for North sea sprat. We shall be doing our utmost to secure an outcome that is in the UK fishing industry's best interests. This morning, my hon. Friend the Minister of State and I had a useful meeting with the UK industry and it was noticeable and heartening that its priorities and our priorities coincided almost identically. My hon. Friend and I have taken careful note of the views expressed by hon. Members today and, obviously, we will keep in close touch with fishermen's representatives before and during the Council on Thursday.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) raised the question of farm salmon. He knows that the Government are committed to the Scottish salmon farming industry, which makes an important contribution to the economy of the highlands and island of Scotland and to his constituency in particular. In view of the difficulties that have beset that sector in the past, I have been working with the Scottish industry to try to avoid further market disruption.

That has had one important positive result. Earlier this year, the Norwegian Government were persuaded to introduce feed quotas, which have reduced substantially salmon production in Norway, but, despite those measures, the salmon market has been depressed for more than a year, with the average market price for quality salmon having fallen by some 15 per cent. since last December.

Our industry's concern over competition in the European Union market has been such that the Government encouraged the Scottish Salmon Growers Association to submit an anti-dumping and anti-subsidy complaint to the EU. If convincing evidence comes to light from the Commission's investigation of those complaints, I have assured the industry of the Government's wholehearted backing.

I had hoped that the Norwegian Government's feed restrictions would lead to a recovery in the latter part of this year, but that failed to materialise, so the Government formally requested that minimum import prices for a limited period were reintroduced. Despite efforts to persuade Commissioner Bonino of the case for such temporary action, that request has been rejected.

I am appalled by such insensitive treatment of the industry and of the entire highlands and islands of Scotland, which the Commission recognises as an area of particular need. Mrs. Bonino told me that the European market for salmon had been stable in recent months, if prices were monitored in ecu, but she fails to realise that our salmon farmers are paid not in ecu, but in sterling.

Over the weekend at the Dublin summit, my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear to President Santer the Government's dissatisfaction about the handling of the UK request. He has asked President Santer to take a personal interest in the matter, which we expected would have been considered by the College of Commissioners as a whole. At the Fisheries Council this week, I shall repeat that concern and I look to the Commission to recognise that Scottish producers are entitled to some safeguards while their complaints about dumping and subsidies are investigated.

We have had a useful debate. My hon. Friend the Minister of State and I have listened to various concerns—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. I can barely hear the Minister.

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend and I have listened to the various concerns that have been expressed and we will consider those further before Thursday's Council. Our basic aim for the Council on Thursday and Friday, and Saturday if necessary, is simple enough. It is to achieve the best deal possible for our fishermen, having regard both to their immediate and to their longer-term needs. Our primary concern in the debate has been to focus on the practical problems facing our fishermen, to show what action we have taken and what further actions we have in hand to protect the long-term interests of this great industry.

There are no simple quick solutions, no panaceas to these problems. I say to some of my hon. Friends who campaign for leaving the CFP that such an approach will be of no practical help to the fishermen whom we all seek to help. It will not solve any of the problems simply to draw new lines on the maps of our seas. Our fishermen are looking for their interests to be strongly and effectively represented at the Fisheries Council in Brussels. That is what my hon. Friend the Minister of State and I intend to do.

We recognise that our fishermen are looking for a fair deal on TACs and that Northern Ireland's fishermen are looking to be protected from the full impact of the Hague preference system. We know that our fishermen are not happy with the Commission's proposals for reducing fishing fleets—and certainly not with the erosion of UK quotas at the hands of quota hoppers.

Conservative Members are facing up to those problems. Not for us the playing of politics, using the livelihoods of Britain's fishermen in some tawdry little game that has nothing to do with fishing and everything to do with trying to embarrass the Government. We will have none of that. We will leave that to Opposition Members, but to treat one of our country's oldest and finest industries with such contempt is to the eternal shame of Opposition Members. We can represent the interests of fishermen more effectively if we go to Brussels with the wholehearted support of the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 305, Noes 316.

Division No. 30] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joseph
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Cunningham, Ms R *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeffrey
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Strat'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice

Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Sir Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David

Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 316, Noes 304.

Division No. 31] **[10.16 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel G)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(N Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochf'd)*
Clarke, Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Sir Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'fd)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Hicks, Sir Robert
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Horam, John

Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guild'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Jopling, Michael
Kellett–Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox–Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McNair–Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, John
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Riffkind, Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Sir Timothy
Scott, Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsf'ld)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joseph
Austin–Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Beith, A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alex *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Cunningham, Ms R *(Perth Kinross)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davies, Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeffrey
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Dr John
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David

Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Ab'd'n N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr L *(B'ham Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Killoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Miss Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stret'd)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian *(Makerf'd)*
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Oakes, Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Robert
Shore, Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document COM(96)641 relating to the fixing of total allowable catches for 1997 and certain conditions under which they may be fished; and supports the Government's intention to negotiate the best possible fishing opportunities for British fishermen consistent with scientific advice and the need to sustain the stocks for the benefit of future generations of fishermen.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. A rumour is spreading round Westminster that a car park pass in the name of an hon. Member is being used by someone else who is associated with the leadership of the official Opposition. Will you confirm that car park passes should be used only by those who are officially authorised to use them?

Madam Speaker: Order. I do not deal in rumours.

ADJOURNMENT (CHRISTMAS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 22 (Periodic adjournments),

That this House, at its rising on Wednesday 18th December, do adjourn till Monday 13th January.—[*Mr. McLoughlin.*]

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation,

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Northern Ireland

That the draft Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 20th November, be approved.

That the draft Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 20th November, be approved.

COUNTY COURTS

That the draft High Court and County Courts Jurisdiction (Amendment) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 25th November, be approved.

FINANCIAL SERVICES

That the Financial Services Act 1986 (Extension of Scope of Act) Order 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 2958), a copy of which was laid before this House on 25th November, be approved.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

COMMUNITY RAILWAY POLICY

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 10003/95, relating to the development of the Community's railways, and 9654/96, the Commission's White Paper on the revitalisation of the Community's railways; and endorses the Government's position on the actions proposed by the Commission.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

FLOOD PREVENTION AND LAND DRAINAGE (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 94E (Scottish Grand Committee (Bills in relation to their principle)),

That the Bill be referred to the Scottish Grand Committee.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

Question agreed to.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That at the meeting of the Committee on Monday 13th January, notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (3) of Standing Order No. 94E (Scottish Grand Committee (bills in relation to their principle)), the Chairman shall put any Question necessary to dispose of any Motion which may be made in relation to the Flood Prevention and Land Drainage (Scotland) Bill at half-past Two o'clock, if not previously concluded.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

PETITION

Children's Hospital (Manchester)

10.32 pm

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): The 1,000 names of Stockport residents on this petition were collected by Mr. and Mrs. Geldard and their family. They are determined that the recommendations of the Ashworth report be implemented so that no other family should have to undergo the pain and anguish that they have suffered and still suffer. The petition states:

In December 1995 10-year-old Nicholas Geldard died of a brain haemorrhage after a 12-hour ordeal. He had been shunted between four hospitals because there were no paediatric intensive care beds available in Manchester. An inquiry into Nicholas's death found many failings in the local health service and made major recommendations.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Health to ensure the urgent establishment of single specialist children's hospital in Manchester where children can be diagnosed and treated; that in the interim all children's intensive care services are reorganised to ensure that children's lives are not put at risk through bad organisation; and that those hospitals with paediatric intensive care beds be ordered to publish details of usage of those beds and how many children have been turned away each month, so the public can make sure that every sick child in need has access to a local intensive care bed.

To lie upon the Table.

Green Belt

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

10.34 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I am grateful to have the opportunity to raise the subject of the protection of the green belt. There is no doubt that the green belt policy, which has been in place for almost 50 years, has been successful.

The metropolitan green belt is well established. Most of my constituency lies within it. Without it, we probably would have had urban sprawl and ribbon development all the way between London and Oxford, if not further afield. The green belt policy is certainly firmly supported by the two local authorities that cover my constituency—South Buckinghamshire district council and Wycombe district council.

There is always the need for constant vigilance of the green belt. There is constant development pressure on my constituency, which already has three motorways—the M4, the M25 and the M40.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): There is no doubt that there is pressure on the green belt, but does my hon. Friend know of the plan to build 868,000 more houses in the south-east of England by 2011? That will certainly put enormous pressure on the green belt.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and very much agree with him. We need to try to ensure that as many of those houses as possible are built in urban areas on reclaimed derelict land, rather than in the green belt where they would take up more of our lovely countryside.

There is constant pressure on the green belt. As well as the three motorways in my constituency, there is gravel extraction, the proposed expansion of terminal 5 at Heathrow, the complementary relocation of the Perry Oaks sludge treatment works to Iver, the Eton rowing trench and the Maidenhead flood relief scheme. I am glad to say that we saw off the threatened Central Railway project.

The Maidenhead flood relief scheme is under construction by the Environment Agency. One might think that a body called the Environment Agency would be particularly concerned about the environment. Construction of the scheme has only just begun, yet in a letter from the chairman of Dorney parish council, Mr. Ken Richmond tells me:

"it is becoming apparent that the Environment Agency has little or no interest in the local environment or in our opinions as to how the problems which the Agency is causing could be addressed."

Mr. Richmond also sent me three photographs of the desecration that the Environment Agency has already caused. Unfortunately, it is not possible to reproduce photographs in *Hansard.* I wish it were; it would probably be a little bit more interesting if it were illustrated. All that evidence underlines the need to adopt an absolutist policy on protecting the green belt. There should be no exceptions to the policy; we must have a very tough approach and be vigorous at all times.

Given the context, I must say to my hon. Friend the Minister that I read with some amazement the latest consultation paper issued by the Department of the Environment, which is entitled:

"Proposed New Permitted Development Right To Extend The Garden Of A Dwellinghouse."

It was published last month, and says:

"The Department is concerned that the benefits of requiring a planning application are not significant".

I strongly challenge that assertion. I believe that they are significant and that the damage that would be done if one did not have to get planning permission to extend a garden into the green belt has been grossly underestimated by my hon. Friend's Department.

The paper goes on:

"Concern has been expressed to the Department that the requirement to obtain planning permission . . . is an unnecessary burden."

Could my hon. Friend tell me by whom that concern has been expressed? I was unaware of a great clamour for a change in the law in this respect. Most people understand that they need planning permission and accept it.

The paper continues:

"It is argued that neighbouring householders and other users of adjacent land would not be adversely affected".

I beg to differ with that too. Neighbouring householders could be severely adversely affected by the proposal. Indeed, some already have difficulty with what people do in their gardens. If the new right were introduced, life would be made even more difficult for them. The paper states:

"very little is . . . gained in planning terms by the current controls in this area."

I strongly disagree with that too.

On the document's second page—its main virtue being its brevity—which is also to do with extending a garden, it says:

"Householders would . . . be able to fence the land, erect porches, garden sheds, tennis courts, garages and oil tanks, and install swimming pools, satellite antenna and hard surfaces subject to the same restrictions currently set out in the Order for existing gardens."

That could all be done without any planning permission.

The next paragraph says:

"There would be no restriction to the area which could be added to a curtilage under the proposed permitted development right."

In ordinary language, that means that one could buy a five-acre field, fence round it, make it one's garden and, over a period of time, build any number of swimming pools, tennis courts or whatever.

I received a response to that from the director of planning services of South Buckinghamshire district council, Mr. Paul Geehan, who is an excellent planning officer. He said:

"I was absolutely amazed to receive the attached consultation paper from the DOE. Essentially the proposed changes in planning rules would allow householders to annex an area of countryside, including the Green Belt, and incorporate it into their garden. They would then have the same permitted development rights to build in the extended gardens as currently exist in existing gardens or grounds of houses. These include covered swimming pools, domestic stable blocks, domestic garages, sheds, laying a hard surface, summerhouses, etc. Providing these buildings were more than 5 metres from the dwelling, no higher than 3 metres (with a flat roof) or 4 metres (with a ridged roof) and did not cover more

than 50 per cent. of the total curtilage excluding the original dwelling, basically people could do what they liked providing it stayed ancillary to the residential use.

With your intimate knowledge of the green belt, you do not need me to tell you the sort of things people get up to and the pressure the area is under. The proposal now before us would give a green light to urbanising the Green Belt and if it goes ahead, I believe its impact would be disastrous."

Mr. Steen: I follow my hon. Friend's argument about the green belt and I agree with it, but that is as far as I would go. Would he be happy to confine his remarks to the green belt? Does he agree that extensions should be allowed to houses and in green fields that are surplus to agricultural use, as set out in the Green Paper?

Mr. Smith: I am not at all sure about that. My main concern is with the green belt, because the whole of my constituency lies within it. My hon. Friend is better qualified to speak on other matters.

The planning officer continued:

"As an example of what could be done, a householder living in a property on the edge of the Green Belt could buy the next field, annex it to his property and build over at least half the field. Providing the use were for the householder and his family, subject to the height restriction already mentioned they could build an indoor swimming pool and changing area, a stable block and other buildings for pets, a tennis court, a new drive, a multi-car garage block, a recreation complex (e.g. snooker/gymnasium), sheds, domestic workshops, greenhouses, caravan hardstanding area, summerhouses, a chapel etc., etc., etc. Even if one of these developments were carried out, Green Belt policy would be seriously undermined. In addition of course, there would be nothing in planning terms to stop playing fields or areas of open space being annexed. The proposal seems to be in conflict with national policy on keeping Green Belts open (PPG2) and on policies which stress the value of recreation and open space (PPG17)."

I have had a similar letter from Stoke Poges parish council, where I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) lives; he has considerable knowledge of the area. The clerk there said:

"These dangers are already apparent in Stoke Poges. For example, I enclose a map of some land at the rear of properties in West End Lane and Park Road indicating where fences have been erected partitioning off a field in the green belt. It is very important to preserve these fringe areas of green belt otherwise the extent of the green belt will be eroded and its aims and objects impaired. In this case not only is the green belt affected but public footpaths interfered with."

The purposes of the green belt are set out in planning policy guidance note 2. They include the aims

"to check unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas"

and

" to safeguard surrounding countryside from further encroachment."

In my view, although it sounds like a modest measure of deregulation, the Department of the Environment's proposal could be the thin end of the wedge. It undermines the objectives of PPG2, and I hope that when the consultation comes to an end the Department will throw it out.

10.43 pm

Sir Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): With the permission of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), I should like to contribute briefly to this important debate.

When I first saw the deregulation news release from the Department of the Environment, I thought for a moment that the publication date had to be 1 April, in which case I could have understood why it had been sent to me. I certainly thought that it was a hoax of the first order.

I am astonished and amazed that the release could have crept out of the Department under the guise of deregulation. I have such respect for my hon. Friend the Minister that I can only assume that he was away on holiday when it was sent out.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield has correctly pointed out a number of things that could happen if the ghastly proposal ever came to fruition. The owner of the extended garden would probably want to fence it. That would result in small pockets of land, or whole fields, sprouting fences up to 2 m high without the need for planning permission. That would break up the countryside and damage the all-important concept of openness, which you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are well aware is one of the crucial criteria for green belt land.

Since half a garden may be covered with buildings, sheds, hard-standings and the like, developments could include multi-storey garages, indoor or outdoor swimming pools, recreation rooms and stable blocks—later perhaps to be converted to a granny bungalow when the owner discovers that he does not have any horses. Although existing rights of way would not be expunged, one can imagine that they might soon be obstructed, or that the owner might try to have cross-field paths legally closed on the ground of lack of use. As we all know, most people are reluctant to cross what looks like a private garden. Such rights of way might be diverted to the edge of the property.

What about a person who wanted to conduct some activities which are unacceptable in the green belt? He could buy a house bordering it, buy the land behind the house, fence that land and then conduct the activity while claiming that it was related to the amenities of the house and within its curtilage. Alternatively, the person might already own the land behind the house, buy the house, unite the two sites and proceed to behave as I have described.

The Department might say that such suggestions are far-fetched, but I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister, given his knowledge of the subject, will readily agree that such manoeuvres can take place. They are real problems, which arise in real life.

The proposal, were it to come to pass, would create what I can only describe as shed city on the green belt. It would set neighbour against neighbour. It would be a nightmare for planning officers, for councillors of every kind, and, not least, for hon. Members. We would be faced at our constituency surgeries by angry constituents who had discovered that they could do absolutely nothing about the buildings that had sprouted up on the green belt land near their homes.

It is a matter of great regret that there are only a few days to object to the proposal. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to tell the House that he is willing to consider extending the period for consultation so that elected representatives of every kind can have the opportunity to make their objections known.

I am sorry to say that I feel that the consultation paper is the most ill thought-out, environmentally damaging and unsustainable suggestion that the planning profession has

[Sir Michael Shersby]

been requested to respond to in recent times. It is difficult to believe that the Department is serious, particularly at a time of increasing environmental awareness and support for the protection of the countryside for its own sake.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield rightly asked what are the concerns that have been referred to in the consultation document and have apparently been expressed to the Department. There is no evidence to support what has been asserted. The amount of concern and the importance to be attached to it needs to be seriously questioned. *[Interruption.]* I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am running out of puff. I regret to say that I strongly oppose the Department's proposal, and I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider the effect that it might have on the effectiveness of Thames valley water, which has helped to restore my voice to this debate.

10.49 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) for providing the opportunity to discuss this important matter. I agree wholeheartedly with him about the green belt, and about the suburbanisation of the countryside. What better example of that can there be than the constituency of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary who is to reply to the debate? Croydon was once a wonderful rural area, but it is now totally suburban. There is something to be said for guarding against the expansion of the green belt.

I would like to throw in the caveat that we must distinguish between green belt land and green-field sites. The idea that green-field sites might end up full of tarmacadamed drives, stable blocks, granny flats and swimming pools seems to suggest that people who own their own land will lower the value of that land. Self-interest and private enterprise are the hallmarks of the Conservative party, and deregulation is at the centre of our economic policy. I am fortunate enough to chair the Conservative party's Back-Bench committee on deregulation.

I agree that the inclusion of the green belt extension is a damaging precedent, but the use of alternative land means that green fields go fallow. That is a tremendous burden on the public purse, and the money could be used for something useful. One must conclude that people who own land will use it to the best advantage, and we must remember that there is a distinction between the green belt and green fields.

10.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): We must congratulate the Environment Agency on one point. It now contains the National Rivers Authority, which was responsible for the glass of water that allowed my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) to conclude his speech.

This has been a much more entertaining debate than I expected—that was this week's understatement. When the Government publish a consultation document, we like to receive varied opinions and reactions to it. We try to put the document in the simplest of forms so that it can get the fullest of answers. This evening, we have had the fullest of answers, with two of my hon. Friends on one side and one on the other.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) on raising this matter. By the time he finished, I had visions of Barnum and Bailey or Ringling Brothers' circus being parked in his and his neighbours' back yards. That was a slight exaggeration. There is a consultation document, and I shall take the points raised in the debate on board. We will read tomorrow the points raised by my hon. Friends, and ensure that they go into the consultation.

We accepted that effective limits would be set by the criteria that the land must form part of the curtilage of the house and be used for purposes incidental to the enjoyment of the house. The slight exaggerations that we heard this evening—although emphasising a point—were a little beyond the pale. We are not talking about huge garden extensions that cover large parts of the countryside and change its real nature. We have issued the consultation document on the proposals, and we specifically asked for views on the principle and the detail. Careful attention will be paid to those views. It is worth reiterating that this is part of a full package that includes policy planning guidance note 2, which refers to green belts.

It is worth stating one or two facts about green belts to emphasise the importance of bringing the discussion document into perspective. Green belts are popular at home and are widely admired abroad. I remember as a child looking at pictures of the English countryside, and it is a beautiful part of the English scenery that we all know—including those who come here as tourists. Since 1979, the extent of green belt land has more than doubled, and it now covers 12 per cent. of England—some 3.8 million acres. This also applies to the metropolitan green belt—as has been mentioned this evening—which covers a substantial part of the region around London and the home counties. About 21 per cent. of the south-east is formally designated as green belt, and it encompasses some of our thriving towns. Green belt land is very important—it remains an essential tool for containing urban sprawl and it is one of our major assets.

Housing policy and the difficulties with development that we will encounter were mentioned. When discussing that policy we have to recognise that the Government have acted in various ways to ensure that development and new households—the demand for which is there, whether we like it or not—are brought to so-called brown land. We are already succeeding—about 50 per cent. of new dwellings are on brown land and we hope that that figure will rise.

I appreciate my hon. Friends' comments, especially those of my hon. Friends the Members for Beaconsfield and for Uxbridge, both of whose constituencies are on the edges of London. It is vital that we retain the green belt and I back my hon. Friends all the way.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 17 December 1996

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S COLLEGE LONDON BILL [LORDS]

Ordered,

That the Promoters of the King's College London Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be read the first and second time (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read) and shall be ordered to be read the third time;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during any previous Session.—[*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Traffic Policy (London)

1. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will commission a study of the effect of pedestrianisation and traffic rerouting schemes on local socio-economic developments in the London boroughs. [7851]

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): Circumstances all over London are so different that I do not believe that an overall study would help. Nevertheless, it is up to local highway authorities to ensure that pedestrianisation and traffic rerouting encourage trade in local shops, ensure proper parking provision for shoppers and provide a safe and attractive environment.

Mr. Dykes: I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for his courtesy in answering the question himself. There is no reason why he should be conversant with the details of the Wealdstone traffic bypass scheme, but will he ask his officials to look into it, bearing in mind the fact that the pedestrianisation and traffic bypass configuration are causing local traders a severe loss of business? Would it be possible for an advisory group of his officials to put right the wrong decisions made by local officials and councillors in the original scheme?

Mr. Gummer: I am happy to see whether my officials can help Harrow. It is crucial that local businesses should be given the best trading opportunities, particularly in an area such as Wealdstone. I am sorry that the council appears not to have taken that properly into account.

Mr. MacShane: With London the most clogged-up capital in Europe, is not the best news for pedestrianisation in the capital the fact that Ministers' drivers are threatening to strike, which may make Ministers get out and walk, use the tube or the buses, or get on their bikes? For the first time in a long time, they will see how ordinary people have to live and move in London. Will the Secretary of State give us a clear commitment, before he goes into obscurity, that London will follow Europe and have more pedestrianised zones in the city centre?

Mr. Gummer: As I understand it, London is in Europe. The hon. Gentleman is kind to favour us with his presence today from Geneva. No doubt he knows a great deal about the various capitals of Europe. I do not believe that his comparison between traffic in London and that in the rest of Europe is remotely accurate. If he spent enough time here to see how much we have been doing to improve traffic and pedestrianisation arrangements in London—not least the plans for Trafalgar square and Parliament square—he would be able to ask a more helpful question.

Local Government Finance

2. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the local authority associations on the 1997 revenue support grant settlement. [7852]

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): None, yet.

Mr. Hoyle: Does the Minister agree that his Government give with one hand and take with the other? For the penny reduction in income tax, the public will have to pay at least 2p in council tax. Does the Minister realise that, if the Government were a company, they would be prosecuted for fraud?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman is clearly subject to some arithmetical confusion. The Government have reduced income tax. Council taxes will rise somewhat because we have always felt that it is sensible to return some financial autonomy to local government. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Just wait. That is what local authorities keep telling me that they want. It is interesting that, when the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who leads for the Opposition, addressed local government associations last week, he said that a Labour Government would spend much more on direct grants to local authorities to enable them to deliver what

the Government wanted. I want to give local government more autonomy and he wants to give it less. If he does not trust his councils, why should anybody else?

Mr. Atkins: Will my right hon. Friend be sure not to listen to any representations from Lancashire county council, especially if they contradict the representations that he has had from Lancashire Conservative Members? He listened to our representations and deferred the area cost adjustment, which was being pressed by the Labour party and would have cost Lancashire some £20 million. Does he recognise that he will receive the thanks of Lancashire Conservatives and of Lancashire folk as a whole for listening to what we said to him?

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend is right to say that he and other Conservative Members made representations on the area cost adjustment. It is true that I felt that there were problems that had to be resolved before we could address whether that mechanism could be adapted to the standard spending assessment. We have asked local authorities to suggest what work needs to be done to take the matter forward. If Lancashire wants to make representations to me, I must, of course, be willing to listen. However, as he would expect, I always listen to local government representations, with a long list of questions to which I want answers in return.

Mr. Rendel: Is the Minister aware of the letter writing campaign of Cabinet Ministers, and no doubt other Conservative Members to head teachers and chairs of governors peddling the myth that the Government are providing more money for education this year? Is he further aware that the recipients of the letters treat them with scorn and ridicule because they know that the blame for education cuts lies with the Government, not local education authorities?

Mr. Curry: It is normal for hon. Members to want to be in regular contact with their teachers and local education authorities; I am, in my constituency. No doubt hon. Members will want to make it clear that local authorities, except those caught by the rule on absolute excess, can increase spending on the passported services, of which education is the most important, over and above what they spend now by the full amount of the standard spending assessment increase, without penalty or cash cuts in the other services. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will convey that message to his head teachers.

Mr. Congdon: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the local government settlement was far better than many local authorities had expected? Would not their complaints about funding gain more credence if authorities embraced compulsory competitive tendering by encouraging the private sector to bid rather than awarding contracts in-house, and paid more attention to collecting taxes and rents?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is right to say that local authorities have a prime duty to perform the basic management functions of local government efficiently. The filling of voids in council houses and the collection of rents and council tax, which is proving to be a good tax and one that is easy to collect, are the prerequisites of good local government. He asked whether local authorities thought that the increase was reasonable. I sometimes get the impression that, if the Archangel Gabriel were to fly across the country distributing £10 notes, local authorities would still find a way of saying that the settlement was inadequate.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Minister confirm that, early next year, he will expect Conservative Members to vote for a local government grant settlement that will mean that the citizens of Westminster will contribute only 4 per cent. towards the cost of their council services, while council tax payers in the average Conservative constituency will contribute 25 per cent., and that some Conservative Members will be voting for a settlement that will require their council tax payers to contribute more than 40 per cent. of the cost of their local services—10 times what will be asked of people in Westminster?

Mr. Curry: I know that the hon. Gentleman has had a bad week, what with his little local difficulty in Camden and the Sunday newspapers saying that he was about to be demoted, so I understand why he has not asked an especially good question.

Because Westminster sets a level of expenditure well below its standard spending assessment, it depends a lot less on what has to be raised from local taxpayers than other councils, which set a level well above SSA. If everyone ran as prudent a council as Westminster, less tax would be imposed on people. It is about time that people realised that the hon. Gentleman's only interest is in waging a prolonged war against Westminster. The citizens of Westminster will note that, in the event of a Labour Government, they will be the first to cop it, with the rest of the country shortly behind.

Citizens Juries

3. **Dr. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to promote the use of citizens juries in local government and planning matters. [7853]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): We are currently undertaking, with the local government associations, research on issues surrounding public participation in local government, which could include citizens juries.

Dr. Wright: May I ask the Minister to be slightly more interested in the reply that he has just given me and to give the House a sense that he genuinely wants to know about some of the innovations and experiments that are going on in local authorities throughout the country? For example, there is a scheme in Lewisham, involving young people on drugs; and one in Hertfordshire, involving local people in waste management issues.

Is the clue to the Government's attitude to be found in the letter from the Deputy Prime Minister that appeared in newspapers recently, describing the Government's approach to public services and saying that they were not attracted by the idea of new democratic bodies, because they attracted the enthusiasts?

Sir Paul Beresford: We are certainly interested, and I am aware of the cases to which the hon. Gentleman

refers; hence the conclusion that we might examine the matter in the research. The difference is that, in court juries, the selection is random and, as critics have pointed out, juries of the kind that he is talking about are not. I am sure that he would not want juries, whether on planning or on personality selection, to be rigged.

Mr. Wilkinson: It would be an excellent idea to have a jury in the local government area of Hillingdon, where the socialist borough council is seeking to foist on local people plans for social housing in green-belt land, on the St. Vincent's hospital site and on Field End recreation ground. Those plans are bitterly opposed by local people. Is it not the case that, if local people were properly consulted and if the council heeded the objections of the Department of the Environment, such monstrosities would not be foisted on the electorate?

Sir Paul Beresford: My hon. Friend is aware that there was a spontaneous jury in his area: about 4,000 objections were received at the second stage of the unitary development plan, and that is probably a record.

Green-belt Land

4. **Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his policy towards providing protection for green-belt land in planning legislation. [7854]

Mr. Gummer: I have pledged myself to defend the green belt. That attitude extends to metropolitan open land and to the attempt by some local authorities to sell off school playing fields.

Mr. Davies: Is the Secretary of State aware that the Labour council in Oldham is planning on dumping the best part of 2 million cu m of industrial spoil on green-belt land in Beal valley? It can do that because it claims that the end use will be a golf course. Is he aware that a council of any political complexion could in theory dump on green-belt land for the best part of 100 years by claiming that the end use would be an approved development? Should not the guidelines be toughened to stop such despoliation?

Mr. Gummer: I am aware that, after extensive consultation by the borough of which the hon. Gentleman is a member, it received only 21 letters, one of which was from himself. It is therefore extremely difficult to believe that the local authority—although it is not an authority that I support—has got it wrong. There are occasions when despoiling of green belt needs to be remedied, and sometimes that is done by the proper use of filling. That may or may not be right in the case to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but it is for the local authority to make its decision, and he had a great opportunity, as a member of that authority, to put his case.

Sir Kenneth Carlisle: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a good way of protecting the green belt is to enhance the vitality of town centres, and will he therefore develop policy to curtail large out-of-town retail developments?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right. Creating such vitality would not only protect the green belt but draw people back into town centres, to live, work, shop and carry out leisure pursuits. That seems to be the right way forward, and I am glad that the Labour party has now begun to agree.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: Does the Secretary of State think that opencast coal mining on the green belt should ever be justified? Will he make it clear that opencast coal mining applications on green-belt land will not be allowed?

Mr. Gummer: I remind the hon. Lady that it was I who changed the presumption against opencast coal mining, which her party never did and had never pressed before. I did it without Labour's help—

Mr. Hardy: That is wrong.

Mr. William O'Brien: The Minister is wrong.

Mr. Gummer: Hon. Gentlemen must not say what is untrue. I changed that presumption because I take the view that there should be very specific reasons for allowing opencast coal mining. I have been extremely careful in checking each application.

Mr. Steen: Is not the threat of 4 million new houses being built on the green belt due to the fact that people have difficulty living together? Every time a marriage breaks up, two houses are needed where one home was needed before. In order to cater for the 4 million new houses that will be needed in Britain by 2011, will my right hon. Friend ban building on green-field sites until the inner cities and land inside city boundaries is full? Many such areas have much vacant land at the moment, which could and should be used first.

Mr. Gummer: I have made it absolutely clear that I do not intend to allow building on open spaces as a means of satisfying the need for 4.4 million homes. I have said that that building should take place to the maximum possible on areas that have already been used—on the present footprint. I intend to insist on that.

Beaches

5. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to amend the criteria for publishing lists of beaches conforming or not conforming to European Union legislation on bathing water cleanliness. [7855]

The Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency (Mr. Robert B. Jones): At present, we have no plans to amend the Department's current practice in that regard.

Mr. Morgan: As it has now emerged from recent written answers that I have received that 117 out of 346 English beaches and 22 out of 55 Welsh beaches failed the faecal streptococci test in 1996—the key test for determining public health consequences of swimming in dirty sea water—does the Minister agree that the Government need to change their policy and the environmental information that they publish for people about to use our beaches? If he promises to do something

about that today, I in turn will promise never again to use the hoary chestnut about the need for real action on clean sea water rather than just going through the motions.

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman revels in undermining the British tourist industry, and that is a disgrace. I shall give him a clear piece of advice. So long as there is a Conservative Government, we shall conduct affairs based on proper understanding of science and risk. If there were ever to be a Labour Government, their windfall tax would ensure that there was no room for improvement in standards, as well as hitting people's pensions and creating unemployment in the water industry.

Mr. Mans: Will my hon. Friend congratulate all those in Fylde who have helped to make the beaches around Blackpool and Fleetwood so much cleaner? Will he join the leader of the Labour council in Blackpool and other local Labour politicians in their criticism of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) for his ill-informed criticism and comments on the clean-up of the Fylde coast?

Mr. Jones: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. He will remember that rainy winter's day when he and I stood on the front at Fleetwood considering possible remedies to the problem. Together, we conducted a campaign to ensure that Blackpool's beaches were improved. I congratulate him on his achievement, which has certainly done a great deal for the tourist industry in his area.

Mr. Meacher: Further to the Government's emphasis on their record, will the Minister confirm that, in 1990, the Secretary of State for the Environment claimed that all bathing waters in the United Kingdom would be brought up to European standards by 1995? On that basis, will he explain how, in 1996, 47 UK beaches officially failed to reach the European mandatory minimum standard—more than the number that failed it last year—and some of them failed it due to pollution more than 20 times above the maximum permitted limit? Since the Secretary of State likes to use his family to persuade us that things are safe, will he allow them to swim off those beaches?

Mr. Jones: Perhaps I could remind the hon. Gentleman that the late unlamented Labour Government, of whom he was an especially undistinguished member, had a moratorium on investment in the water and sewerage industries, as a result of which the privatised water industry had to cope with a huge backlog. None the less, we are making rapid progress.

Anti-social Tenants

6. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to provide assistance to local authorities in respect of anti–social tenants. [7856]

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): The Housing Act 1996 contains a package of measures to help local authorities deal with anti-social tenants.

Mr. Thompson: The Government's recent announcements are good news for many council tenants in my constituency of Norwich, North. They provide another example of the good that the Government have done for my constituents since 1983. Complaints about anti-social tenants feature strongly in my constituency surgeries, so the news is indeed good. Can my hon. Friend ensure that Norwich city council starts the introductory tenancy scheme at the earliest opportunity?

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend is right about the good news for tenants—the vast majority of tenants, who want to be protected from the activities of anti-social tenants. Norwich council would do well to consider the proposals for introductory tenancies, as well as strengthening the grounds for obtaining possession against anti-social tenants and making it easier to give evidence against tenants who behave badly and intimidate law-abiding tenants. All those measures will be important in helping the vast majority of law-abiding tenants.

Mr. Betts: If the Government are so concerned about the problem of anti-social tenants, and want to take action, why did they reject Opposition amendments tabled to the Housing Bill in Committee, with the support of Labour local authorities and their tenants, especially those designed to extend witness protection schemes to all occupiers irrespective of tenure, and in very serious cases to extend the use of injunctions with mandatory powers of arrest? The Minister, in particular, rejected those amendments, although local authorities and tenants want the powers to be used.

Mr. Clappison: If the hon. Gentleman read the Act, he would see that it attaches the power of arrest to injunctions. He will remember that, when the Committee examined in detail the Labour party's proposal for a community safety order, it was found to be an unsatisfactory and unworkable mess that was not even pressed to a vote. He may also remember that, when proposals came before the House to impose secure training orders on youngsters who persistently commit serious criminal offences, the Opposition voted against them. Talk is cheap, but the Labour party has no stomach for firm action.

Out-of-town Shopping Developments

7. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his Department's planning guidance for out-of-town shopping developments. [7857]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: In June, we published the revised policy planning guidance note 6, "Town Centres and Retail Developments", which is designed to provide stronger support for town centres. We shall report progress on the Government response to the Environment Committee next month.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank the Minister for that reply, but the Government's belated recognition of the issue of town centre development has caused much damage to many urban centres, including those in my constituency such as Ossett, Rothwell and Normanton, as well as the neighbouring towns of Horbury and Wakefield. Out-of-town shopping developments such as Asda and Meadowhall generate car use and damage the

environment. Can the Minister assure communities and local authorities that turn down planning applications for out-of-town shopping developments that the developer must prove beyond any shadow of doubt an overwhelming need for such facilities before the Department will give approval?

Mr. Jones: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's proposition, because that is Government policy. All applications are dealt with against the background not only of PPG6, with the rigorous tests that he mentioned, but of PPG13, which focuses on the issue with which he started—traffic generation—so I can certainly give him those assurances. I find it disappointing that there are still councils that do not judge such issues against the background of PPG6 and PPG13, with the result that we have to call applications in for examination at a public inquiry. It would be much better if that were not the case.

Mr. Day: Does my hon. Friend agree that, although the Government's change of policy on out-of-town shopping developments has been most welcome, for some areas—such as my constituency—it has come too late? We now have a large shopping development at Cheadle Royal, with another two miles away at Handforth Dean in the Tatton constituency. Those developments have had a significant impact on the villages of Cheadle, Cheadle Hulme, Heald Green and Bramhall. Given that the Government obviously recognise the damage that has been inflicted by changing the policy, will they not consider going a step further and looking at the possibility of reducing business rates for small retailers in a five-mile radius of new shopping stores?

Mr. Jones: As my hon. Friend knows, rateable value is based on the going rents in a particular area and any decline in the relative prosperity of a particular village or town will eventually come through in terms of a differential in the rateable value of those out-of-town sites.

Local Government Finance

8. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effect of his public expenditure proposals for local government on the provision of local authority services. [7858]

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made to the House on 27 November.

Mr. Cohen: Is it not the case that central Government funding for local education authorities is increasing by only 0.5 per cent. in cash terms—well below pay and price inflation? Far from there being new money for education, do not one third of local education authorities face a cash cut in central funding next year? Are not the Government to blame for more stress and slash in education and other council services, and for an increase in council taxes of more than 6 per cent. next year?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman will know that, if local authorities succeed in attracting parents to their nursery schools, and therefore parents use cash vouchers to educate their children in local authority schools, not a single local authority will suffer a cash cut in its education SSA next year. We have made special provision so that the increase in education SSA can be passported straight through on top of existing levels of spending.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in a letter of 9 December, the clerk of Lancashire county council admitted that the council does not have time to make a judgment on the levels set by the Government? Is he further aware that the council spends its entire time criticising those levels without having properly assessed them?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is closely attuned to the pulse of Lancashire, and she speaks for a great many ordinary people in Lancashire who know what the local authority gets up to. If I had to listen to the advice of Lancashire county council or my hon. Friend, I would take her advice every day of the week.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Minister confirm that, if Calderdale council had received as much grant per head as Westminster this year, it would not have had to collect a council tax at all and could have given £290 back to each council tax payer? Is he further aware that, if the council had received the same help for education as Westminster, it could have employed another 831 teachers?

Mr. Curry: I wonder whether the hon. Lady is aware that, if all local authorities had received the same revenue support grant as Islington—together with that for the precepting authorities—it would have been worth £897.61 a head, and the average band D council tax would have been reduced by more than £1,500, making it a negative? In addition, the cost of the revenue support grant nationally would have increased by £27 billion, adding 15p in the pound to the basic rate of income tax. That shows what a thoroughly silly question was asked by the hon. Lady.

Estates Renewal Challenge Fund

9. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities were awarded funding under round 1 of the estates renewal challenge fund. [7859]

Mr. Clappison: Eleven local authorities have been awarded funding in the region of £174 million. This will secure improvements to 19,000 homes on 29 needy estates.

Mr. Bellingham: I thank my hon. Friend for that excellent reply. Is he aware that many people in Norfolk are rejoicing at the news of the list of winning bids in the capital challenge pilot scheme? As well as two excellent schemes in Norwich—one of which is worth £2.5 million and the other nearly £4 million—there are two in my constituency. First, there is the North Lynn gateway scheme—where the go-ahead has been given to environmental improvements to the entrance to a school—and secondly, the Hunstanton regeneration scheme. The latter scheme will be most welcome, as it will regenerate the waterfront and many other parts of the town. Are those

not examples of the Government listening to local people and going ahead with environmental improvements to their communities?

Mr. Clappison: It is good news that those environmental improvements are taking place in North Lynn and Hunstanton in my hon. Friend's constituency. I am sure that he, too, will be pleased that there are to be substantial improvements in the 29 needy estates that are in some of the most rundown areas of the country, as well as improvements for tenants in the form of repairs and maintenance.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the Minister agree that it is gross hypocrisy to talk about improving conditions on a small number of selected estates when the Budget savagely cut housing investment and, as a result, condemned hundreds of thousands of tenants throughout the country to live in substandard housing? If the Government are really serious about improving housing conditions, why do they not release the £5 billion of capital receipts?

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. He should applaud transfers of housing that bring about repairs and maintenance for tenants, especially when they take place in the most needy areas. He should make it clear whether he is promising more spending on housing, or saying that cuts should fall elsewhere. If he will not, will he explain how he would go about funding housing? We have made it clear that we want there to be transfers, and all the improvements that they bring, and that we want to bring in private capital alongside public expenditure and so get greater value for money. We have heard nothing from the hon. Gentleman, and that failure is becoming increasingly widely recognised.

Councillors (Allowances)

10. **Mr. Garnier:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what powers he has to control the level of allowances which local authority councillors award themselves. [7860]

Mr. Gummer: To ensure that local people can see what their council is doing, we have required local authorities to publish annually the amount of allowances paid to each of their councillors.

Mr. Garnier: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the leader of Leicester city Labour group, aided and abetted by his Labour cronies, and without any proper consultation with the taxpayers of that city, has raised his allowance from £4,000 a year to more than £27,000 a year? What price local democracy under Labour?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. and learned Friend may have noticed that it appears that, earlier this year, there was a 600 per cent. increase in the allowances paid to councillors in Leicester, yet this very morning representatives from Leicester were in the office of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration complaining that they do not have enough money to meet their bills for essential services. It does seem that Leicester ought to look at its priorities.

Mr. Sheerman: The Secretary of State will know that, fairly recently, in the name of improving democracy, we in this House voted a substantial increase in our pay. Is it not about time that, to ensure the quality of candidates from all parties that come forward for local government, we pay local councillors a decent rate? Is not that good for local democracy? Is it not harmful that the cheapjacks on the Conservative Back Benches ask questions like that? Does it not undermine local democracy and the real effort being made by Labour councillors up and down this land?

Mr. Gummer: I happen to think that real effort is made by councillors of all sorts, not only Labour councillors up and down this land. [HON. MEMBERS: "He said that."] The hon. Gentleman specified Labour councillors up and down this land, exhibiting the usual bias that he brings to the House. Many of us did not vote for that increase in pay. Furthermore, we are talking about 600 per cent. increases in the allowances paid to councillors who then complain that the taxpayer does not provide them with enough money to carry through services. If councillors ran enabling councils, instead of trying to run everything themselves, they could do the work far more effectively and in a great deal less time.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, apart from publishing the amounts of councillors' allowances, local authorities should publish the amount that they have written off to benefit the political friends of councillors?

Mr. Gummer: Transparency in these matters is very important, but what is most important is that, when councils insist on increasing the amount paid to their councillors, they should recognise that those sums are supposed to be honoraria for help, not payments. One of the distinguishing features of local councils is supposed to be that they are run by people who do it while also doing another job.

Minerals Planning Guidance

11. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to review minerals planning guidance note 3; and if he will make a statement. [7861]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Minerals planning guidance note 3 was fully reviewed and revised in July 1994. There are currently no plans to revise it again.

Mr. Barnes: Is the Minister aware that there are 15 opencast operations or applications in the north-east corner of Derbyshire, which are ripping its guts out, in addition to historic operations in the area? Should not mineral planning guidance notes take into account the cumulative aspects of the matter? They are supposed to take into account current and future operations, but they take no account of historic operations and they should do so. There should also be an investigation in north-east Derbyshire to establish whether the cumulative aspects of the matter are being taken into account.

Mr. Jones: That is incorrect. We take the strong view that local authorities, in drawing up plans for their areas, should include the criteria by which they will judge planning applications. They should, if appropriate, include

the cumulative effect of such applications. It is entirely the responsibility of Derbyshire county council and the hon. Gentleman's local authority to ensure that applications are processed in the right way.

Mr. Nigel Evans: I accept the need for minerals for construction and road building, but does my hon. Friend accept that the guidelines need to be sufficiently flexible to reflect the changing needs and priorities of certain areas—such as tourism in the Ribble valley—to ensure that the local authority has sufficient protection to be able, in certain circumstances, to turn down certain planning applications from companies in my constituency?

Mr. Jones: Authorities' local plans should be flexible, so that they can respond to changing circumstances. As my hon. Friend knows, every planning application must be dealt with on its merits, and if the merits—or disbenefits—change, that is a material consideration for the local authority to consider.

Ms Ruddock: Is the Minister aware that the test of environmental acceptability in the revised guidance of which the Secretary of State today boasted is proving a farce because the Coal Industry Act 1994 requires sites to be sold on the best available terms? Does he agree that environmental criteria should be included in "best available terms" and, if they are, can he explain why the ecologically important site of Shilo north in Broxtowe has been sold to RJB Mining in preference to the conservation bid made by that local authority in the interests of the community?

Mr. Jones: "Best available terms" must necessarily reflect the obligations that any owner has to make environmental improvements or to accept environmental controls over what it does, and the need to take a risk on the likelihood or otherwise of gaining planning permission for any extensions. As there is no presumption in favour of development in green areas, it would be very difficult for such an applicant to prove a case unless the benefits considerably outweighed the environmental disadvantages.

Business Rates

12. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the level of business rates charged to small companies, partnerships and sole traders. [7862]

Sir Paul Beresford: As my hon. Friend is aware, the Government have taken steps to ensure the freezing of the business rate for small businesses for the coming financial year.

Mr. Fabricant: Is my hon. Friend aware that many villages—such as Pipe Ridware in my constituency—in which small businesses are located will benefit from that? Is it not the case that about £100 million has been made available from the Budget for that purpose? Was my hon. Friend shocked, as I was, that when the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) asked a question earlier, he did not thank my hon. Friend for the £4.5 million capital challenge grant from his Department which will safeguard 1,100 jobs in Burntwood?

Sir Paul Beresford: Some people are ungracious in the extreme, but my hon. Friend is right. Small businesses in towns and villages are congratulating the Government on the move.

Mr. Pike: Recognising that the Government have had to take measures to minimise the effect of next year's revaluation on small businesses, and remembering that the legislation that introduced the national business rate was the second part of the Thatcher legislation that launched the ill-fated poll tax, will the Government now admit that that was the worst flagship ever launched and that they should now scrap all that legislation?

Sir Paul Beresford: That is a bit rich coming from the hon. Gentleman, who, when we were discussing this matter in Committee yesterday, talked about the business rate returning to the local authority setting. I know that he was trying to goad me, but he should recognise the damage that Labour-controlled local authorities have done in the past. Consider previous rates: Camden set a business rate for small businesses of 229.2p; Westminster set a rate of 171p—a dramatic drop; and one of my better-known favourites, Wandsworth, set a rate of 161.1p. We can see in some parts of central London the damage that business rates set by Labour-controlled local authorities did. Shop after shop in Tottenham Court road is shut because of Camden council.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 17 December. [7881]

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mrs. Fyfe: Has the Prime Minister seen today that another London hospital has shut its doors to emergency patients? At the Victoria geriatric unit in Glasgow, a notice asks staff to think cost-effectively and limit incontinence wipes to two per person. Does the Prime Minister still maintain that the NHS is safe in Tory hands?

The Prime Minister: Not only is the NHS safe, it is improving its service day by day. What the hon. Lady missed out of her litany were the 70 or so improvements in primary health care announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. The hon. Lady knows that not only is the health service improving, but resources for the health service are improving both globally and per patient.

Q2. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 17 December. [7882]

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend recall reports from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development some years ago, when inflation was 27 per cent., there was disaster everywhere and the International Monetary Fund had to be called in? Will he contrast those reports with the latest OECD report, which says that this country is set for record economic expansion and more growth than for 30 years, which will benefit the health service and everyone else? Would not all that be put at risk by uncosted Labour promises if the Labour party was ever elected to office—which it will not be?

The Prime Minister: A few weeks ago, the shadow Chancellor dismissed the economic improvements in this country as propaganda. The OECD report published today shows how inaccurate he is. It says that prospects for achieving sustained output, growth and low inflation are the best for 30 years. The OECD now expects the UK's growth rate next year—and the year after next—to be the highest in the group of industrial nations, easily outstripping Japan, Germany, France and the United States. It also forecasts falling unemployment on the back of that. There is no doubt that it is a glowing report. It is the best OECD report that this country has received for very many years, and it shows the best economic prospects that we have had for very many years.

Mr. Blair: Will the Prime Minister now tell us specifically by what date the European beef ban will be lifted?

The Prime Minister: I note, first, that the right hon. Gentleman does not deny the OECD report and does not wish to comment on it.

The right hon. Gentleman knows that the beef ban will be lifted by our European partners and that I cannot tell him precisely what date that will be. We have taken measures for the ban to be lifted, and I shall seek the lifting of the ban progressively as soon as possible. We are now in the process of discussing a certified herd scheme that would cover the whole of the United Kingdom and from which we hope to see a progressive lifting of the ban.

Mr. Blair: If the Prime Minister wants to ask me questions, I shall be happy to swap roles whenever he wishes to call the general election.

The Prime Minister's answer on beef is extraordinary. Does he not recall that, after the Florence summit, he came to the Dispatch Box and said that he had a firm agreement that, if we did certain things, the ban would be lifted, and that the timetable was in our hands, not Europe's? [HON. MEMBERS: "He did not say that."] He certainly did say that. He said that, at the end of November, the ban would be lifted on scientific evidence. Is it not clear that he had no such agreement; that there was no guarantee that the ban would be lifted; that the timetable is in the hands of the veterinary committee; that he cannot give us a date; and that the lifting of the ban was not proceeded with on scientific evidence? Can the Prime Minister tell us the date by which the ban will be lifted, if the Florence agreement holds?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is misleading the House.

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sure that the Prime Minister does not mean the words that he has just said. I must ask him to withdraw them. No hon. Member misleads the House.

The Prime Minister: No doubt innocently, the right hon. Gentleman has misunderstood the situation on beef—and not for the first time. The conditions that are necessary for the scientific committee to consider lifting the beef ban depend on actions that we take. That is correct. Among those actions is the selective cull. That is correct. As I reminded the right hon. Gentleman yet again yesterday—not for the first time—the selective cull was delayed because of the extra evidence on maternal transmission and because the over-30-months scheme was larger than anybody had supposed. The position now—

Dr. Strang: Who are you kidding?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is the Opposition's agriculture spokesman and he is supposed to know. If he does not know, I understand why the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) does not know. We now know who is providing the information that the right hon. Gentleman misunderstands. We are now seeking to obtain progressive lifting by means of the certified herd scheme, as we have set out, on more than one occasion, to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Blair: So the Prime Minister cannot give us a date for lifting the ban. *[Interruption.]* The Government gave us a date before, they did not honour it and they cannot give us a new one. I have just checked in *Hansard*, and the Prime Minister specifically said that the date for lifting the ban was in the hands of the British Government. If that is correct, why can he now not give us a date? The answer is that it is not in his hands. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may shout, but the truth is that BSE is a symbol of the Government—they are incompetent, incapable and can never be trusted.

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman reads what I said a few moments ago, he will understand why his third question is absurd, as was his prepared sound bite. It is no good his trying to fix facts. He cannot fix polls, as we have seen, and he should not try to fix facts.

Mr. David Atkinson: Does my right hon. Friend recall the question that I put to him almost exactly a year ago about the failure of most computer systems in this country and throughout the world to recognise the year 2000, which will have enormously damaging consequences, not least for British business? Does he accept that, one year on, widespread ignorance of and inaction in response to the problem remain? Will he now give serious consideration to my ten-minute Bill, the Companies (Millennium Computer Compliance) Bill, which would do much to ensure that the computer systems of British businesses will be safe in three years' time?

The Prime Minister: I shall undertake to ensure that my hon. Friend's ten minute Bill is examined carefully by

my right hon. Friends. The underlying problem to which my hon. Friend refers is very serious, and we do not intend to leave it without action.

Mr. Ashdown: The Prime Minister can huff and puff as much as he likes, but speak to any farmer in this country and they will say that the BSE fiasco tells us all we need to know about this Government: they dither at home, posture abroad, surrender at the end and blame it all on Europe. Does the Prime Minister realise that the anti-European opinion in his Cabinet, on his Back Benches and overwhelmingly among his candidates throughout the country means that, far from fighting for Britain in Europe in 1997, the Conservatives will become Britain's out-of-Europe party in 1997?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has a long tradition of being very supportive of the European Union. After all, some time ago he said:

"We want Ministers to make decisions in public and without single nation vetoes".

The right hon. Gentleman would surrender that. He has also said that he does

"not believe in the sovereignty of Parliament"

as far as the European Union is concerned. The hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) has written to my right hon. Friend the Minister Without Portfolio claiming that his party does not want a united states of Europe. I find that very odd, as the same hon. Gentleman said some time ago:

"our"—

that is, Liberal—

"ideas on Europe are totally illiberal . . . we want to create a bureaucratic and centralist nightmare".

Not only are the Liberals unable to agree among themselves, they cannot even agree with themselves.

Sir Roger Sims: Is not today's White Paper, to which my right hon. Friend referred earlier, to be welcomed, as it both extends the facilities available to patients and increases the involvement in primary care of health care professionals such as nurses and pharmacists? Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that additional resources will be given to the national health service to develop the White Paper proposals?

The Prime Minister: We have set out a commitment for additional resources over and above inflation for the national health service throughout the next Parliament—a commitment that we have honoured during the past 17 years and which other parties seem unable to match. My hon. Friend is right about the importance of primary care services. The proposals announced today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will lead to better general practitioner premises, a wider range of services available closer to home, better training for GPs and other staff, expansion of nurse prescribing, more funds for research into primary health, and much else besides. It is a very significant advance in the march towards far better primary health care.

Official Visits

Q3. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Prime Minister when he intends to pay an official visit to Wakefield. [7883]

The Prime Minister: I have no plans to do so.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Has the Prime Minister had the opportunity to study the correspondence that I sent him last week concerning my constituent, Mr. Wayne Hood of Wakefield, who was recently sent to prison for four years for the attempted murder of his former foster parent who seriously sexually abused him over a seven-year period during his childhood and adolescence? Bearing in mind the fact that the foster parent has been gaoled for seven years for those serious offences against Mr. Hood and other children in his care, will the Prime Minister support the call for a review of Mr. Hood's sentence? While I do not condone Mr. Hood's actions, has he not been treated very harshly by the courts in view of his background and circumstances?

The Prime Minister: I have seen the correspondence that the hon. Gentleman sent to me, and I am grateful to him for giving me notice of his question. I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's deep interest and concern about this case. I made inquiries, and I understand that an application for leave to appeal to the Court of Appeal has been lodged. The hon. Gentleman will know that, in those circumstances, it is not appropriate for me to say anything further now. I believe that that is the correct way to pursue the matter. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to discuss it with me privately, I will be happy to see him.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the people of Wakefield would not want us to leave this year without congratulating Damon Hill on winning the sports personality of the year award? Would not they be amazed to know that he achieved that without an audience participation unit?

The Prime Minister: I should like to congratulate Damon Hill on his success. The whole country took a great deal of pleasure in his many wins throughout the year. He is a very deserving winner of that poll. In the spirit of amity at Christmas, I shall not respond to the latter part of my hon. Friend's question.

World Trade Organisation Conference

3.30 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian Lang): I should like to make a statement to the House on the outcome of the first ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation held in Singapore last week, at which I led the United Kingdom's delegation.

The Government are convinced that free trade offers unparalleled opportunities to enhance prosperity, not only in the United Kingdom, but around the world. Accordingly, we had three objectives for the conference. The first was to agree a substantial programme to carry forward trade liberalisation in the WTO, including, in particular, forward-looking work on trade facilitation, standards, Government procurement, tariffs and investment, which is a key priority for British business.

The second objective was the completion, in outline, of an information technology agreement aimed at the progressive elimination of tariffs on information technology products, with the widest possible participation by WTO member countries. The third was to make real progress on negotiations to liberalise basic telecommunications, which are scheduled to conclude by February 1997. I am glad to say that I have positive news to report on all three objectives.

There is now provision in the WTO's new work programme for many of the United Kingdom's priorities for tackling the trade barriers that still remain outwith WTO rules. On trade facilitation—or the simplification of import and export procedures, which was a British-led initiative—the programme agreed opens the way to new co-operative work between the WTO and other relevant international organisations to reduce burdens on trade. Those procedures currently add some 10 per cent. to the costs of goods in international trade.

On Government procurement, all WTO member countries will now engage in work on transparent procedures, which should help to open a much wider range of opportunities for exporters and save taxpayers' money around the world, by encouraging more competition in public tendering procedures. That is an important step forward. Again, it was a British-inspired initiative.

On technical product standards, the way is open under the WTO's work programme to increase co-operation between the WTO and international standards organisations so as to concentrate work on priorities that are of real practical importance to trade, and to reinforce the use of international standards.

The Singapore ministerial declaration contains a renewed commitment to the progressive liberalisation and elimination of tariffs and non-tariff barriers generally. A working group will be established to look at the range of issues that arise in the relationship between trade and investment. That is vital to Britain as the world's second largest overseas investor.

A working group will be established to study the relationship between trade and competition policy. We will want to promote the development of competition regimes in countries that do not have them, and to reduce any barriers to markets created by anti-competitive practices.

The biggest immediate trade liberalisation achievement of the week was an agreement in principle to phase out tariffs on a wide range of information technology products by the year 2000. Our aim is maximum country participation and maximum product coverage. The deal was instigated by the European Union and the United States, but was joined by 11 other countries. Overall, the participating countries represent about 83 per cent. of world trade. Definitive conclusion of the agreement is scheduled for 1 April 1997, subject to increasing country coverage to the equivalent of 90 per cent. of world trade and reaching satisfactory final arrangements on the staging of tariff reductions in the run-up to the year 2000.

The value of this to Britain will be significant. It will eliminate tariffs facing British exporters in a number of key overseas markets; it will reduce the cost of vital IT products which we import, such as semiconductors; and it will stimulate new growth and enterprise, as there is no British industry that does not rely on IT products in its operations. In money terms, the value to the United Kingdom is estimated at £250 million on tariff cuts alone, setting aside the enormous potential of increased global trade in information technology. As the US trade representative has said, this is

"a huge global tax cut".

An important deal was also agreed between the European Union and the United States on the further elimination of tariffs on spirits. That is very good news indeed for our drinks industry, particularly the Scotch whisky industry. Specifically, the EU and the US have agreed to accelerate the elimination of their tariffs on the import of whisky, brandy and other brown spirits. At the same time, they have also agreed to eliminate their tariffs on the import of gin, vodka and other white spirits over the next five years.

Good progress was also made in the on-going WTO negotiations to open up world telecommunications markets. As the House knows, Britain has benefited greatly from having one of the most liberal telecommunications markets in the world. Nine countries pledged new or better offers, in addition to the 34 commitments already made. That has improved the prospects of an agreement by February 1997, which could be worth $20 billion per annum to Britain by the year 2010.

The United Kingdom was also influential at the conference in helping to keep the WTO focused on trade liberalisation issues. Ministers agreed that economic growth and development, fostered through increased trade and trade liberalisation, offered the best prospect of raising labour standards. The relevant passage in the ministerial declaration also makes it clear that the International Labour Organisation is the competent body to deal with labour standards, while noting that the existing limited collaboration between the WTO and ILO secretariats will continue. In practice, that means that, as has been the case for some time, the two secretariats will send observers to each other's meetings. I am sure that that approach, through trade liberalisation, offers the right way forward, rather than an approach based on sanctions or other restrictions.

In this context, the United Kingdom also pushed hard for specific market access commitments for products from the least developed countries. Those countries account for only about 0.4 per cent. of world trade. I therefore

welcome the plan of action agreed by Ministers, which aims to provide more favourable and predictable access for the exports from those countries.

I am happy to say that for the United Kingdom and, I believe, for the world as a whole, the conference was a substantial success. It has enhanced the authority of the World Trade Organisation, and the overriding importance of reducing barriers to trade on a multilateral basis. It represents an important step towards the British Government's objectives of launching a new round of trade negotiations before the end of the century and, in the longer term, achieving global free trade.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Does the President of the Board of Trade understand that Labour Members find some of the things in his statement very welcome? On some issues that he set out before he went to the conference, there is common ground across the House. We certainly welcome, for example, the simplification of procedures for importers and exporters, the extension of greater transparency in tendering for public purchasing, the work on achieving greater conformity in international standards, where Britain has a great potential competitive advantage, and the potential establishment of the working groups, which will consider a range of issues arising between trade and investment and trade and competition. Labour Members certainly share the Government's view that those are all desirable means of progress.

We would identify one issue of slight concern. We might be anxious if we thought that there had been the convergence of view on core labour standards that the President of the Board of Trade has identified, but as it appears that everyone is claiming victory on that front—I understand that Commissioner Brittan said that the discussions had been a breakthrough in dialogue on these matters—clearly there is a certain amount of common ground there and not necessarily a clear victory for the Government's view, as the President sought to suggest.

The President raised the issue of liberalisation of telecommunications, which we welcome in the context of the WTO talks. We want it to be achieved through completion of the single market, to which my party is committed. Will he confirm a report that companies such as IBM are suggesting that, if liberalisation produces real savings, they may be channelled specifically towards research and development? That would be an interesting and useful breakthrough and I would be grateful if he could cast any light on the matter.

I notice that the President has identified three principal priorities, but he also mentioned a fourth issue: piracy and intellectual copyright, which, in his speech last week, he identified as costing consumers in the European Union about £2 billion. Was anything discussed at the conference that may cast light on progress on that issue?

Finally, the President of the Board of Trade has mentioned his proposals for a new international round of trade negotiations. Again, reports suggest that there was perhaps not as fulsome a welcome for the notion of a full-scale, all-singing, all-dancing new trade round as he might have hoped. Again, will he clarify the Government's position in this respect because, clearly, although we are all anxious to have constructive developments along those lines, a whole new trade round is a slightly separate matter?

Mr. Lang: I thank the right hon. Lady for her welcome for various matters that I have reported to the House, in particular the improvement in import and export procedures, trade facilitation, the transparency of Government procurement, progress on standards and the working groups that are to be established on investment and competition. I agree that those are all major steps forward in the existing programme's agenda and that they set up the new work programme that the Government were keen to see.

On core labour standards, the right hon. Lady referred to other countries claiming a breakthrough. The declaration's conclusion agreed to the primacy of the International Labour Organisation as the body responsible for these matters, to support basic standards throughout the world—as all countries that have signed the United Nations convention on human rights do—to recognise that trade liberalisation helps to improve working standards in poor countries, and to confirm that there is no contemplation of any attack on developing countries.

There was no reference to a future work programme or to future continuing activity in the WTO on the matter. There was no mention of sanctions. There was a commitment only to the continuance of existing contacts. That agreement, as enshrined in the declaration, conforms exactly to the Government's position. I warmly welcome that sensible and realistic conclusion, which was widely supported by most countries throughout the world.

I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for her welcome for progress in the telecommunications sector and I agree about the desirability of further liberalising the single market in this respect. Indeed, considerable progress in working up the EU's offer has taken place in Europe. For example, Spain has brought forward its offer on liberalisation by several years.

On the question of savings and their application specifically to research and development, that is essentially a matter for the market, but I have not the slightest doubt that the extensive investment in R and D that takes place in the telecommunications industry will be enhanced. We are talking about additional telecoms traffic worldwide of $1,000 billion by the year 2010, and the United Kingdom's share of that is likely to exceed $20 billion. Therefore, if an agreement can be achieved by the middle of February next year, it will be a major breakthrough for the extremely well liberalised telecoms industry in the UK.

With regard to intellectual property rights, the conclusion was to reinforce the work already agreed in the Uruguay round. That will continue to be a high priority for the British Government.

Finally, on the right hon. Lady's question about a full trade round, there is—on the contrary—a growing commitment within the WTO membership to recognise the benefits that trade liberalisation brings. Through the agreement of the working programme, we are already moving de facto towards a new trade round, and I anticipate that at the next meeting of the WTO or the one after that, it should be possible to achieve an absolute commitment to make further progress in that respect.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and excellent progress in this

[Mr. John Redwood]

crucial area. What impact will that have on EC regulations and directives? As he has made such excellent progress in world liberalisation, do we need fewer EC regulations, because they are subsumed by the global progress?

Mr. Lang: Yes, I am happy to give my right hon. Friend that assurance. I mentioned, for example, the progress on telecommunications liberalisation achieved in working up the EU offer. In the other areas to which I referred—the working groups on investment, competition, Government procurement, standards and trade facilitation, which was one of the British-inspired initiatives—there will in every respect be an opportunity to dispense with unnecessary regulations. The trade facilitation initiative in particular enables us to tackle what the United Nations conference on trade and development—UNCTAD—has identified as about 10 per cent. of the value of trade in goods, so there are major opportunities ahead.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): May I too welcome the progress that has been made, particularly in information technology, telecoms and—as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) would want me to say—spirits tariffs. What discussion was there at Singapore about the environment? Does not conventional trade liberalisation often lead to environmental damage? Is it not important that we should cease to cling to the argument that economic growth must come before action to protect the environment? How does the President assess the environmental cost in relation to the benefit of any increase in trade that may result from the conference?

Mr. Lang: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. That is an important topic, on which some progress, albeit limited, was made at Singapore. The WTO committee on the environment and trade had made a useful start, and has now been made a permanent body, so environmental issues are increasingly recognised. My own view is that free trade and environmental protection are mutually supportive. Indeed, environmental protection creates a number of major trading opportunities for countries such as the United Kingdom, which is advanced in the provision of equipment and technology for reducing environmental pollution. This is an important area, on which there is still more work to be done.

Mr. Bill Walker (North Tayside): Has there been any progress with Japan, following the WTO ruling on whisky duty? My right hon. Friend's interest in whisky, and mine, is much deeper than just superficial.

Mr. Lang: As my hon. Friend says, the WTO ruled in favour of the European Union in that dispute. I am glad to say that the Japanese Government have accepted the ruling. They are still in negotiation with the EU and the United States and Canada about the final terms of the resolution of the dispute, but I am optimistic that it will be resolved shortly. Thus, in addition to the EU-US deal on spirits, there is also promise in the negotiations on the taxation of whisky in Japan. I hope that that double measure of good cheer will cheer my hon. Friend up as we approach the festive season.

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): Did the conference take a position on the trade in armaments with oppressive regimes, such as Burma and Indonesia?

Mr. Lang: No. So far as I am aware, the trade in arms was not discussed at the conference.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that more than half our total export earnings come from countries outside the European Union, and that we run a large balance of payments surplus with those non-EU countries in the so-called invisible trade sector—that is, financial services and investment? If that is so, will my right hon. Friend continue his laudable efforts to liberalise that sector of trade, which would have a much more direct and beneficial influence on our future trade and prosperity than any other project, such as handing over our economic sovereignty to a European central bank?

Mr. Lang: I am not sure that all my hon. Friend's figures are correct. Our trade with Europe is about 60 per cent. of the total. However, our trade with countries outwith Europe, particularly the far east, is expanding very rapidly, and there are major long-term opportunities there. Moreover, we have a balance of trade surplus on the current account figures with every continent except Europe. To that extent, therefore, I can give my hon. Friend some encouragement. We have a global surplus in services of £6 billion, which I think applies in every continent in the world. That is extremely encouraging.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Minister aware that there is another story to be told? All the world trade liberalisation in which the Tory Government have taken part in the past 17 years has resulted in deregulation, in BSE, in longer working hours and in all the other problems that have arisen. Since 1983, it has resulted in a balance of payments deficit; and, in the past six years, under this Government, it has resulted in the doubling of the national debt, to £380 billion. It sounds like a barmy road to me. In the best days of Parliament, in the years after 1945, we had full employment, shorter working hours and regulations. We also had a surplus in our balance of payments. The net result of the Government's proposals is a move towards slave labour economies and towards the lowest common denominators, instead of searching for the highest common factor.

Mr. Lang: Clearly old Labour is still alive and living on the Opposition Benches. I do not recognise the picture painted by the hon. Gentleman. The policies pursued by the Government, including trade liberalisation, have created several years of falling unemployment, which is now more than 3 per cent. below the European average; record-breaking inward investment; rising manufacturing output, creating 150,000 jobs in the past three years; our exports beating records worldwide; and recognition by the OECD that the UK will have the fastest growth rate, not only in the European Union but, next year, among the G7.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I express my appreciation for my right hon. Friend's good

work in Singapore and for his encouraging statement? But would not we all be much more encouraged if the objective of total elimination of tariffs and of non-tariff barriers were matched by progress in that sphere by the European Union, most notably in agricultural products? Is not such progress especially desirable as the communiqué set as a further objective special access for less-developed countries, many of which have large agricultural sectors?

Mr. Lang: I agree with my hon. Friend; it is an important subject which must be tackled further. Under the Uruguay round, the situation is due to be reviewed in 1999. Some progress was made in Singapore towards performing work of an analytical and reporting nature, which will be useful in enabling work on further liberalisation of agriculture to occur with more speed in 1999. I hope that the European Union will be a full-hearted participant in that work.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Further to the question of the environment, will the Secretary of State tell us how he now hopes that progress will be made on environmental issues in further negotiations? Specifically, is he confident that such agreements as the Montreal protocol on chlorofluorocarbons, the Basle agreement on hazardous waste, and the London convention on international trade in endangered species will not fall foul of rules on world trade? Does he realise that it is important that we protect the environment, but that we are now putting that goal in conflict with further trade liberalisation?

Mr. Lang: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Those are important issues, and the establishment now of a permanent committee on the environment will enable progress on the issues that he identified and on many others. The United Kingdom Government will be keen a participant in that work.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that—in contrast to the remarks particularly of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—the United Kingdom has gained tremendously by inward investment in telecommunications by liberalising the market and encouraging competition? The United States telecommunications market remains in many respects relatively protectionist and at best favours reciprocal agreements. Has progress been made on opening up that market to British products and services?

Mr. Lang: I agree with the premise of my hon. Friend's question. Considerable progress has been made. The final date for an agreement is 15 February 1997. No doubt a great deal of intensive negotiation will be needed then. Provided the will exists—I believe that it does—there must be at least a reasonable prospect of the United States being a full-hearted participant in a final deal. The United States also stands to benefit enormously from the liberalisation of that massive industry.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Like others, I appreciate the President of the Board of Trade's upbeat report on the conference, particularly his welcome for the plan of action for more favourable and predictable access for exports from less-developed countries. Was there much discussion about the imbalance between the costs of production in such countries and the high price of the same goods in developed countries? For example, it might cost £1 to manufacture trainers that sell for £40, £50 or £60 here or in another developed country. Where is the money going? How much can be poured back to help those developing countries to educate their work force?

Mr. Lang: I have considerable sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's point. In the European Council I pressed for recognition of the desirability of accepting zero tariffs on goods from the 48 least developed countries in the world, which account for 0.4 per cent. of world trade. There was not general agreement in the European Union or elsewhere on that. However, I am glad to say that we were able to make progress on giving technical assistance to the least developed countries, on helping them find access to markets, and on assuring them that there is no question, through trade and labour standards or other such measures, of penalising those areas in which they have a competitive advantage. We are keen to help them to exploit their competitive advantages, gain access to our markets and acquire the technology that will enable them to strengthen their position.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I believe that the United Kingdom is already the most open advanced economy in the world, exporting more per head than the Japanese and more in total than all the Asian tigers put together. If those facts are broadly correct, will my right hon. Friend assure the House that, while he holds his post—which I hope he will do for a long time—he will continue to lean against any tendency towards regional mercantilism among our partners on the continent, and will ensure that the World Trade Organisation has all the necessary powers and competencies to stop those tendencies gaining ground?

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I agree with the premise of his question. I also agree with the sentiments that he expressed. The WTO has a committee to deal with regional issues. There has been a substantial increase in the number of regional groupings. There must be a danger that some of those groupings enjoy a distortion of trade and that others are protectionist and inward-looking. It is our purpose to ensure that regional groupings have a multilateral outlook and form building blocks towards the multilateral free trade agenda recognised by the WTO.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton–under–Lyne): The right hon. Gentleman talked about maximum country co-operation. We all agree with that. Is he aware that China—a country that will play a greatly increasing role in world trade—is not in the World Trade Organisation? What is the right hon. Gentleman's view on the admission of China and encouraging it to enter the WTO?

Mr. Lang: I favour the admission of China, provided that it undertakes to accept the rules and observe them. The WTO already accounts for 90 per cent. of world trade. It has 126 members, but there are also some 30 applicants, of which China is one and Russia is another. I should like those major trading nations, particularly those with massive potential for the next century, to join the WTO, but it is important that they accept the disciplines of the organisation.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): My right hon. Friend and his departmental colleagues deserve

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

congratulation on the leading role that Britain, under their leadership, has played in the success of the Uruguay round of the general agreement on tariffs and trade and on their successes at the WTO conference in Singapore. However, he cannot rest on his laurels, because there is far too much foot-dragging in our regional grouping, the European Union, on providing proper free trade access into our market, especially for developing countries. Will he bear it in mind that countries in Latin America and elsewhere look to Britain to continue to give a lead in pressing for that from inside the European Union?

Mr. Lang: Yes, and developing countries—and the least developed countries—were grateful for the lead that the United Kingdom gave on core labour standards, on opening up our markets and on increasing the access to trade of the least developed countries. We shall continue that work.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): By what margin do the Japanese propose to reduce their impositions on whisky? Was there any discussion of the on-going Libyan sanctions? As a former Scottish Secretary and the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale, the right hon. Gentleman, of all people, knows that there are grave doubts about Lockerbie. Given that the decision-makers in Libya were educated at British universities and technical colleges, is not the damage done by those sanctions to British industry enormous, especially as phase 3 of the great man-made river project is now worth some £10 billion? How is it that the Germans, Italians and South Koreans are trading merrily while British industry is disadvantaged by this American-led policy?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman referred to the D'Amato legislation, which affects Iran and Libya. That was not discussed at the conference. The question of Japanese whisky is still is under negotiation. Japan has yet to reach a final conclusion, but I have indications that the possibility of a substantial reduction in the duty on imported whisky is being contemplated.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): Further to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) on the liberalisation of telecommunications, will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will do everything in his power to ensure that British Telecom's acquisition of MCI goes ahead? Would not a single market among WTO members—which, as he said, already accounts for 90 per cent. of world trade—make trading blocs such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and the EU irrelevant?

Mr. Lang: If we achieved global free trade, regional groupings would become irrelevant. That is why it is important to keep the groupings' eyes on the multilateral agenda and not allow them to become Fortress North America or Fortress Europe. I hope that my hon. Friend understands that it is not appropriate for me to comment on the ambitions abroad of British Telecom.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The Secretary of State was rather reticent in his description of the problems of child labour and working conditions. What does he seriously propose to do to eliminate child labour throughout the world by the enforcement of ILO conditions? Is he not concerned about the growing death rate in the economic zones of China and throughout south Asia in the new industries which is caused by appalling working conditions, the lack of trade union rights and health and safety legislation, and the enormous profits that British, North American and European companies make from such exploitation?

Mr. Lang: This country defers to no other in its condemnation of child labour and forced labour. We will continue to support the ILO in its efforts, through its conventions and other work, to rid the world of such activity. The WTO recognised that that was not an issue for it. It accepted the view that was advanced by me and by other countries that the best way to raise living standards in poor countries is to do more trade with them.

Mr. Roy Thomason (Bromsgrove): Does my right hon. Friend agree that world environmental standards can improve on the back of increased prosperity generated by tariff reduction, which must always remain the primary objective of events such as the Singapore conference, but that such matters should remain on the agenda?

Mr. Lang: Yes, I agree. I believe that at Singapore we made major progress towards reducing those tariffs.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Does the President recognise that condemnation of child and bonded labour is, in many people's view, wholly insufficient? Why was not the conference prepared to propose specific action to combat that scourge, including measures to assist poor countries to help children from poor families to receive an education rather than working themselves into a premature grave? Bangladesh, for example, is taking such action, and it would be greatly helped by support from the rich western world in its efforts to give its children an education rather than encouraging them into child labour.

Mr. Lang: I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that Bangladesh was among the leading countries warmly to welcome the stance of the United Kingdom Government on that issue. Bangladesh and other poor countries receive benefit from the United Kingdom, through our overseas aid programme, and they will receive help through the least-developed countries programme and through the International Labour Organisation, the work of which we support. The WTO is a rules-making body, and if it got involved in trade and labour standards, it would end up making rules that would regulate trade with those countries, impose sanctions and restrict trade. That would be the best way of driving them to even more extreme poverty.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): When the World Trade Organisation recognises the International Labour Organisation, is that the equivalent of the social chapter, so that, as world free trade leads to child and slave labour, the ILO will have to take action to combat such arrangements? If that is so, and we are associated with the recognition of the ILO, will the Government stop slagging it off?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman has got it the wrong way round. Free trade and trade liberalisation increase

trade, and increased trade is the best way of raising living standards in poor countries. Living standards have improved dramatically in countless countries in the past 30 or 40 years, not through the imposition of sanctions, regulations, controls, embargoes or moratoriums, but through trade liberalisation. That is the best way forward.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): Is not the evidence of the past few years that trade liberalisation—this is not the first time that it has been suggested—has done absolutely nothing to deal with the problems of child and bonded labour? In fact, the number of child labourers is increasing, not decreasing. If that is the evidence of the past few years, why should we expect further liberalisation to make the situation any better?

Mr. Lang: I do not know what statistics the hon. Gentleman can produce in support of his claim, but in my experience every country that has had liberalised trade and has traded more freely with other countries has raised its living standards at all levels of society. That is the trend, and it is visible in countless countries in the far east which are emerging into modern, highly industrialised economies and providing major markets for British goods into the bargain.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Will the President reflect on the fact that in his opening statement he did not make a single reference to the environment, unless we were to assume that it was covered by anti-competitive practices? In the face of the evidence from development agencies, as well as environmental organisations, that free trade has brought an acceleration in the rate of environmental exploitation, the exploitation of children, child labour and slavery, does he recognise that there will have to be a re-regulation of some markets if ethical standards are to be imposed on the global trading area?

Will the President also comment on the criticism that is emerging from the developing nations about one aspect that is protected in the WTO agreement: intellectual property rights? At the moment, global corporations have the right to patent genetic lines for seeds, crops, animals and trees—and even for whole tribes—in the developing world.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman will have heard what I said in answer to an earlier question on intellectual property rights, concerning the reinforcement of the arrangements in the Uruguay round.

I did not mention the environment in my opening statement because there were so many items of positive good news to mention that I did not have time to cover everything. Again, as I said in an earlier answer, some positive progress was made on the environment, and we must build on that.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Can the President confirm that the most authoritative recent study shows that child labour has doubled in the past 10 years, particularly in its most odious form of sexual exploitation for business purposes? That is why the United States, third-world Churches, non-governmental organisations and European countries wanted the WTO to discuss the matter. His opposition to that is a mark of shame for our country. Before he hides behind the ILO, will he confirm that it wants the WTO to discuss the matter? Will he also confirm that ILO discussion is meaningless without sanctions and that 18 months ago the Government wanted to withdraw from the organisation? To shelter behind the ILO is pure pre-Christmas hypocrisy.

Mr. Lang: I am not sheltering behind the ILO. The hon. Gentleman makes assertions about figures on child labour without a shred of evidence to support them. Trade liberalisation is raising standards and improving employment conditions in the emerging countries. I am in no doubt about that, and the vast majority of countries that were represented at Singapore shared that view. It is the right way forward, rather than going down the route of imposing sanctions.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Will the Secretary of State confirm that his statement on tariffs on information components applies equally to finished products and partly assembled units? Will such tariffs act consequentially to provide the transparency that he described? Will they result in changes to tax regimes here, and should we therefore expect a statement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer? Given the Secretary of State's statement on the amount of data that will flow through our telecoms systems, does he agree that, should the Geneva discussions on intellectual property rights not reach a fruitful conclusion in the near future, the matter must be a subject of the next trade round?

Mr. Lang: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the issue of intellectual property rights must be carried further. There are substantial advantages to be gained by this country—among others—if measures are better implemented to reduce piracy of intellectual property. The information technology agreement covers such products as computer hardware and software, semiconductors, integrated circuits, passive components, multi-media equipment, and so on. It does not cover consumer electronics. The savings that will flow are from the tariffs on imports and exports, which will flow to the European Union. I do not therefore envisage my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor making an announcement. The reduction in the cost of the products will be beneficial to everybody who uses them as well as those who make them.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): The President of the Board of Trade touched lightly on the Uruguay round and the fact that there are so many loose ends yet to be tied up—on agriculture, financial services, maritime services, professional services and anti-dumping among others. Will he confirm that it is important to tie up those loose ends before we move to new multilateral trade negotiations in a few years' time?

Mr. Lang: It is indeed important to tie up those loose ends, conclude what has been agreed and, if possible, make further and faster progress. There was good progress on the built-in programme at Singapore, but we should not preoccupy ourselves with looking backwards to Uruguay, important though that was. We should also be able to focus on the forward momentum that I believe we have with the new work programme and the information technology and telecommunications deals, as well as the prospect of building towards a new round, which I hope will be announced before the end of the century.

Forensic Explosives Laboratory

4.12 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the inquiry undertaken by Professor Caddy into the circumstances and implications of centrifuge contamination in the Forensic Explosives Laboratory at Fort Halstead.

The House will recall that, on 14 May, I announced that I had invited Professor Caddy, who is director of the forensic science institute at Strathclyde university, to undertake an inquiry into the discovery of RDX, a component of Semtex, in the centrifuge at the Forensic Explosives Laboratory. Professor Caddy was asked to report on the general question whether it was likely that contamination could spread from the centrifuge to samples under examination. He was also asked specifically to examine the laboratory's papers on all past cases in which RDX traces were found and a criminal conviction resulted, and to assess the likelihood that contamination might have occurred in those cases, and he was invited to examine the laboratory's procedures in the trace laboratory, and to make recommendations.

I am today publishing in full Professor Caddy's report as a Command Paper. I have also written to Professor Caddy setting out the Government's response to his report. Copies of the report and the response have been placed in the Library.

Before I turn to the substance of the report, I should like to place on record my thanks to Professor Caddy for undertaking the inquiry. The discovery of explosives contamination in the centrifuge was a grave matter, and one that raised serious questions about the reliability of the forensic evidence that had been submitted by the FEL in some serious criminal cases. I therefore decided to commission without delay an independent inquiry into the circumstances in which the contamination occurred and the implications of the discovery.

I was pleased that Professor Caddy, one of our foremost experts in forensic science and a man of considerable experience in forensic explosives matters, agreed to undertake the inquiry. I am grateful to him for completing that important work so promptly, and for submitting a clear and authoritative report. I should also like to thank Mr. James McQuillan, of the Forensic Science Agency of Northern Ireland, and Dr. Douglas Munro, of the United Kingdom accreditation service, whom Professor Caddy invited to assist him in his inquiry.

The key issue on which Professor Caddy was invited to give an opinion was whether it was likely that the centrifuge had contaminated forensic samples. Professor Caddy looked at all the 124 cases covering the period 1988 to March 1996 in which RDX traces were found and from those identified 14 in which such traces formed part of the evidence before the court, and in which a criminal conviction resulted.

Professor Caddy deals with each of those cases in detail in section 7 of his report. His overall conclusion is set out in section 8, in the following terms:

"From this evidence it can only be concluded that the results obtained from all cases remain a true measure of the presence of the explosive RDX and that no contamination of these casework samples arose from the contaminated centrifuge".

I accept Professor Caddy's findings on the key question of contamination. My officials have accordingly written today to the representatives of the 14 individuals in whose cases traces of RDX formed part of the evidence before the court and a criminal conviction resulted. In the letters, they state that I do not consider that the findings of the report necessitate the referral of any of the cases to the Court of Appeal. That does not, of course prevent further representations from being made on behalf of any of those individuals; but on the basis of Professor Caddy's conclusions, I find no grounds for initiating further action in respect of any of these cases.

I shall take this opportunity to correct a minor error of fact in my written answer to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) on 14 May, which was repeated in my statement on the following day. As Professor Caddy has discovered, the centrifuge was brought into service at the FEL in 1988, not in 1989 as was first thought. That does not affect the scope of the inquiry. All cases in which the centrifuge was used were examined by Professor Caddy.

The conclusion that Professor Caddy has reached on the question of contamination does not lead him to minimise the seriousness of the series of omissions that allowed the contamination in the centrifuge in the trace laboratory to remain undetected for so long. He describes that as a

"scientific oversight which is unacceptable and is to be much criticised".

Professor Caddy's terms of reference invited him to examine FEL procedures in the trace laboratory and to make recommendations. Section 11 of his report sets out 18 recommendations which, he believes,

"will both increase the effectiveness of the FEL and provide even greater protection from the possibilities of contamination".

He sets that in the context of the overall high standards that he found at the laboratory, concluding that

"the FEL along with the Forensic Science Agency of Northern Ireland are probably two of the world leaders in terms of the analytical procedures employed but especially the quality assurance programmes used to monitor the containment of trace levels of explosive".

Professor Caddy has made 18 recommendations. The Government accept 17 of them in full, and work on all those is already in hand. Of the 18 recommendations, 16 primarily concern changes to existing practices and equipment at the FEL, designed to improve the work environment still further. The Ministry of Defence, which is responsible for the FEL, is already taking forward work to ensure that the recommendations are implemented without delay. Resources will be made available to implement the changes that Professor Caddy proposes at the laboratory.

Two of Professor Caddy's recommendations are somewhat broader in focus and, with your permission, Madam Speaker, I shall say a few words about each of them. I turn first to the only recommendation that the Government do not accept in full. In recommendation 12, Professor Caddy says:

"The initial examination of all incendiary and explosive devices should be the sole prerogative of the two UK forensic science laboratories, FEL and FSANI, working in this area."

The Government agree that this work should normally be carried out at these laboratories—indeed, the great majority already is. But we believe that it would be wrong

to remove altogether the discretion on the part of the police to send devices to other laboratories from time to time if there is a sound reason for doing so.

I propose, therefore, to issue guidance to the police recommending that, unless there are sound operational reasons for doing otherwise, they should in future refer all incendiary and explosive devices in Great Britain to the FEL. The Secretary of State for Scotland will issue similar guidance to Scottish forces. In Northern Ireland, the RUC already refers all such work to the FSANI. I have discussed our response to this recommendation with Professor Caddy and he has expressed himself content with it.

Recommendation 18 also deserves special mention. In that recommendation, Professor Caddy states:

"Consideration should be given to the establishment of an Inspectorate of Forensic Sciences as a means of externally and independently monitoring the performance of laboratories in forensic science to the satisfaction of the forensic science community, the legal profession and most importantly the general public."

We accept that recommendation. We shall, indeed, consider whether to establish an inspectorate of the kind that Professor Caddy details in appendix 4 of his report, but I must also have regard to the proposals of the royal commission on criminal justice, which favoured the creation of a forensic science advisory council. Professor Caddy's recommendation implies a system of statutory regulation that is different from and more far-reaching than the approach favoured by the royal commission. I shall now consider both proposals before deciding how to proceed.

In this context, I welcome the proposals that are under consideration to set up a professional body for forensic science. I understand that preliminary meetings have now taken place involving representatives from various forensic science and other organisations. Lord Dainton—the Chairman of the Science and Technology Committee in another place, which reported on forensic science—is leading the initiative as president elect. I believe that this could be a useful initiative, and I shall therefore take a close interest in the progress made.

In summary, Madam Speaker, the Government accept the substance of all Professor Caddy's conclusions and recommendations. We accept in full 17 of his 18 recommendations and have already begun to implement them. We note the professor's conclusion that all the laboratory's analyses, in both case reports and court cases, remain valid. In particular, we note Professor Caddy's key conclusion that the safety of criminal convictions is not in question as a result of the discovery of the contaminated centrifuge. In the light of this, I have decided that the report does not necessitate the referral of any cases to the Court of Appeal.

We are determined to do all we can to ensure that an incident of this kind will never happen again. The FEL has a justifiably high reputation for its experience and for the high standard of its equipment and procedures. Professor Caddy's report does nothing to undermine this position in general, although it is clear that there are lessons which must and will be learned.

I commend Professor Caddy's report, and the Government's response to it, to the House.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): May I first thank the Secretary of State for his courtesy in allowing me time to read Professor Caddy's report? May I also express the thanks of the Opposition to Professor Caddy—described by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) during our exchanges on 15 May as a "distinguished forensic scientist"—for the thoroughness of his work and the independence of mind that he has brought to bear on the report? I also want to place on record our thanks to those who assisted Professor Caddy.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that, although Professor Caddy raised some very important matters of concern—to which I shall refer in a moment—at no point did he question the integrity of our forensic science services or any of their staff? I am sure that the House will be relieved by the central conclusion of the report—that the evidence provided in every case during the period under examination remains valid. The Secretary of State was, however, right to entertain further representations on behalf of the individuals convicted on the evidence once they and their legal advisers have had a chance to consider the report—which, of course, they have not seen at this stage.

However, does the Secretary of State accept that some of the criticism in the report about working practices at the Forensic Explosives Laboratory is very serious? Does he also accept that Professor Caddy's conclusion at section 3.12, that "only serendipity"—a lucky happenstance—brought to light the absence of any testing during and following the installation of the centrifuge, is alarming indeed?

I want to press the Secretary of State on three other points. First, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman acknowledged in his statement, Professor Caddy recommended that all initial examinations of incendiary and explosive devices and other related evidence should be the sole prerogative of the two United Kingdom forensic science laboratories—the Forensic Explosives Laboratory and the Forensic Science Agency of Northern Ireland. The Secretary of State said that he will continue to allow the police to use other laboratories, if there are sound operational advantages in so doing. Does the Secretary of State agree that, given the strength of Professor Caddy's initial recommendations to confine all that work to the FEL and the FSANI, the use of other laboratories should be permitted only if the two main laboratories do not have the capacity at the time to carry out the investigation required by the police?

Secondly, will the Secretary of State accept that Professor Caddy evidently has significant concerns, expressed in section 9.5 of the report, about the way in which the agency status of those two laboratories might "inhibit an open exchange" between the staffs of these laboratories "because of commercial restraints"? Is the Secretary of State satisfied that the commercial restraints of agency status will not get in the way of the need, spelled out in section 9, to increase the intellectual challenge to members of those staffs by their meeting each other and exchanging information?

Thirdly, I want to press the Secretary of State on Professor Caddy's key recommendation to strengthen the independence of the forensic science services generally by establishing an independent inspectorate, which is contained in section 11 of the report and which is his personal recommendation in appendix 4. Does the Secretary of State accept that it is now four years since Professor Dainton called for an independent body to oversee the service and that that was followed by the report of the Royal Commission on criminal justice

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recommending the establishment of a forensic science advisory council, which proposal was given further backing by the Lord Chief Justice?

Although I accept that there is some difference in the specific proposals, the Secretary of State will accept that there is overwhelming agreement among all those parties that there has to be an independent overseer of the forensic science services. Lord Taylor said more than two years ago that the need for such a body was urgent, so should not an advisory council now be established immediately, initially on a non-statutory basis because of the time that it would take at this stage of this Parliament to enact into law proposals for a statutory inspectorate, although that might well be what is needed?

Will the Secretary of State also accept that the continuing delay in the Government making up their mind about the need for an oversight body must add to the concerns that Professor Caddy expressed in his report? Was not Professor Caddy right to conclude that such an inspectorate or body is necessary "to restore public confidence" to the forensic science community who, in turn, perform such an essential role in our criminal justice system?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the measured tone of his response and for his tribute to Professor Caddy and the work contained in his report. I entirely agree that some of the criticisms in Professor Caddy's report are serious and we intend to take them seriously, as is evidenced by the extent to which we have accepted his recommendations.

On the three specific points raised by the hon. Gentleman, first, I do not intend to limit the circumstances in which the FEL and the FSANI should be used by the police to the one set identified by the hon. Gentleman. I would expect that that would normally be the exceptional circumstance in which those laboratories would not be used, but I am not confident enough of my ability to identify all exceptional circumstances at this stage and would therefore prefer not to be tied down in that way.

On exchanges of information, we accept the recommendation that there should be regular meetings, and of course it is important that nothing should inhibit the quality of those exchanges in so far as they bear on matters of the type discussed by Professor Caddy in his report.

Finally, I accept the importance of reaching a decision soon on how we can best act on the desire of the royal commission and Professor Caddy for an independent voice in relation to forensic science, but the recommendations that they made are significantly different from one another, so I am not attracted by the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that I should set up a non-statutory advisory council immediately. I certainly do not exclude the possibility of proceeding, in the first instance, on a non-statutory basis, but I prefer to consider more fully Professor Caddy's recommendation and its relationship with the royal commission's recommendation, and the further developments such as those that I identified, which are proceeding, before I reach a final view on the matter.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): In commending my right hon. and learned Friend on initiating the report, may I suggest that not only the forensic science community but the public at large should take satisfaction from the report? It will restore the public's confidence in the forensic science system.

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with that important point. It is not surprising that some anxiety was expressed when those events came to light, when I commissioned the inquiry, but I believe that the public can have confidence in the outcome of Professor Caddy's report; I agree with my hon. Friend and am grateful for his question.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick–upon–Tweed): Does the Home Secretary agree that it will be a relief for all those involved in protecting the public against the bombing campaign that, despite the errors that were made, Professor Caddy has firmly concluded that convictions are not put in doubt by what happened? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman recognise the implicit criticism of resourcing in Professor Caddy's report? How much money will be made available for the management and research resource requirements that Professor Caddy identified?

On independent monitoring, is it not a little odd, as for at least three years the Home Secretary has resisted setting up an advisory council, that he should now use that as a reason for not setting up a statutory inspectorate? Will he at least say that he is committed to setting up a form of independent monitoring, whichever form is eventually chosen?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his first question. Indeed it is a matter of relief that Professor Caddy came to the conclusions that he reached. I do not entirely accept the right hon. Gentleman's suggestion that the report contains what he described as "implicit criticism" of resource inadequacy; but, in answer to his question, we estimate that the cost of implementing Professor Caddy's recommendations is about £500,000, and those resources will be made available.

On the last point, the right hon. Gentleman's suggestion is unworthy. There have been several developments in forensic science since the royal commission reported; they should be fully taken into account. I recognise that there is a strong case for an independent role, and I hope to reach a conclusion on that matter as soon as possible.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): The whole House will be indebted to Professor Caddy for his report. He is a distinguished forensic scientist.

The Home Secretary said that he saw no grounds for referring cases to the Court of Appeal, but he appeared to anticipate that, when legal representatives of convicted people obtain copies of the report, they might seek to go to the Court of Appeal again on the basis of what is in the report. First, as many hon. Members have not had an opportunity to examine the report, will the Home Secretary tell the House why he feels that those people may seek to go to the Court of Appeal again?

Secondly, he will recall that, in a recent case, a senior official in the forensic science service was highly criticised for his lack of qualifications by, I believe, the Lord Chief Justice on appeal. Is that person involved in any of those cases?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman was reading rather too much into my remarks. As I said, I do not believe that

any grounds arising out of this report would justify any of the cases concerned being referred to the Court of Appeal. However, I have learnt over a long period not to underestimate the ingenuity of lawyers. I said that it was open to representatives of those involved in those cases to make further representations suggesting that the cases should be referred, and that any such representations would be considered.

I do not have available a specific answer to the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question. I have no reason to suppose that the person to whom he referred was involved, but perhaps I can write to the hon. Gentleman on that matter.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I am not complaining too stridently, but the document to which the Home Secretary referred was not available in the Vote Office shortly before he rose to make his statement; therefore, I do not know what the report says about the crucial Lockerbie evidence, about which there is considerable forensic doubt. I refer to the timing device or, more accurately, the sliver of timing device, which was the subject of considerable controversy both at the Royal Armaments Centre and in the United States, where considerable doubt has been thrown on the findings of Mr. Thurman, not least by Mr. Whitehurst, another expert. Rather than answer off the top of his head, will the Home Secretary write to me in detail about this aspect of crucial forensic evidence in the Lockerbie case? It leads to the involvement of Libyan sanctions, which, as was said in the last statement, are so damaging to British industry.

Mr. Howard: Once the hon. Gentleman has read the report, he may find that the essential point that he raised is covered in it. I am, however, perfectly prepared to write to him to answer his question as best I can. I am not entirely confident whether I shall provide in my reply sufficient detail to satisfy the hon. Gentleman, but I shall do my best.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Having been familiar with Professor Caddy's work over the years, I am happy to accept his conclusion that none of the forensic evidence in any of the cases has been disturbed. However, a number of cases in the not too distant past involved mistakes—or worse—by forensic scientists. Two problems have arisen: one is that an unhealthily close relationship developed between the police and some forensic scientists—in the Guildford case, for example, they were not above rewriting their evidence at the police's suggestion; and the second is that forensic facilities have often not been available to the same extent to defence lawyers, so they have been unable to test the prosecution's propositions. Is the Home Secretary satisfied that both those problems have now been resolved?

Mr. Howard: That matter is, of course, quite beside the matters that gave rise to Professor Caddy's report, and quite beside his report. I have no reason to suppose that defence lawyers do not have adequate facilities to enable them to benefit from forensic science, but that matter is not directly raised as a result of the report.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Those of us who have spent years working in laboratories will have listened to the statement with astonishment. It is basic to any analytical procedure that a test is run first on possible contamination of all the instruments involved. We have heard today of incompetence on a mountainous scale. It is hard to believe that a centrifuge was left in that condition for a prolonged time. Is the contaminant to which the Home Secretary referred the only indicator of the presence of Semtex or are there other indicators? Although it is impossible to argue with the conclusion made by a report that few of us have read so far, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell us for how long that centrifuge was contaminated, and whether RDX is the only indicator of the presence of Semtex?

Mr. Howard: I shall resist the temptation to accept the hon. Gentleman's invitation to go into areas of technical expertise that I do not possess. I am satisfied that, when the hon. Gentleman has had the opportunity to read the report, he will find his concerns fully and more than adequately dealt with. There were serious shortcomings, as Professor Caddy reveals in his report, although I am not sure that they add up to the kind of criticism contained in the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I thank the Home Secretary for his statement and Professor Caddy for his report. Will the Home Secretary comment specifically on the case of John Kinsella, whose name was included in the review even though he was not convicted on the basis of any forensic evidence that suggested that he had been in touch with Semtex? I know that the Home Secretary has been reviewing that case in detail and, I believe, has now received the statements from Pairic MacFhloinn in prison, who has accepted responsibility for the Warrington bombings and who has said, on record and specifically, that my constituent, John Kinsella, had no knowledge of the contents of the holdall with which he was left. Can the Home Secretary add any further comments on the review that he has undertaken, specifically in relation to John Kinsella's case?

Mr. Howard: No, I am afraid that I cannot add anything this afternoon. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the basis on which representations have been made in that case is not connected with the presence of explosives. He is also right to say that representations have been made in that case; they are currently receiving careful attention in the Home Office.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Like many Members, I have not read the report and therefore cannot quarrel with any of its conclusions. In his statement, the Home Secretary accepted the view that there should be some degree of independent examination of the work done by the Forensic Explosives Laboratory, but specifically excluded the sending of samples to any other laboratory for testing. Those two points seem to contradict each other. When does the Home Secretary propose that an independent testing regime will be set up? After all, we have had a shocking exposé from Professor Caddy of serious shortcomings in the laboratory.

Mr. Howard: I think, with respect, that the hon. Gentleman slightly misunderstood what I said. Far from saying that I would not agree to have samples sent to other laboratories, I rejected, in part, one of Professor Caddy's

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recommendations that samples should be sent only to the FEL and FSANI. The Government's view is that, although that should normally be the case, there are circumstances in which it would reasonable for the police to use other laboratories. I cannot give a specific timetable for my decision on an independent role, but I recognise the need to come to a view on that matter as soon as possible.

BILLS PRESENTED

Sale of Medicines (Young People)

Mr. Paul Flynn presented a Bill to make it unlawful to sell medicinal products to people under the age of sixteen: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 28 February 1997, and to be printed [Bill 63].

Disabled Persons and Carers (Short-Term Breaks)

Mr. Alfred Morris, supported by Ms Liz Lynne, Sir Richard Body, Mr. Dafydd Wigley, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Rev. Martin Smyth, Mr. Roger Berry, Mr. Peter Thurnham, Mr. John Heppell, Mr. Ken Eastham, Mr. Harry Barnes and Mr. Tom Cox, presented a Bill to provide for assessments of health and social needs of disabled persons to include assessments of the needs for short-term breaks for the disabled person and any carer: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 January 1997, and to be printed [Bill 62].

<2> Pairing Arrangements

4.43 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Has information about the Division last night been a subject of concern for you, in view of the fact that it seems that the Tory Government paired some of the absent Tory Members of Parliament with people on the Labour Benches and doubled them up with people on the Liberal Benches? In other words, they rigged the ballot. In all my 27 years here, I have never heard of anything like that before. It needs a serious investigation, because the Government are in trouble with their lack of a majority and they might do it again and again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): I have to inform the hon. Gentleman that that subject has nothing to do with the Chair.

Abortion (Amendment)

4.43 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend section 1(1) of the Abortion Act 1967 in relation to the grounds on which a pregnancy may be terminated.

It is Christmas and the whole country seems to be immersed in preparations to celebrate that day. It is not a matter for conjecture—Christmas will be celebrated on 25 December and that is the day that the infant Jesus was born. There was an interesting editorial in the *Sunday Express* this weekend that posed the question of how many people actually think about the real purpose behind the celebration of Christmas. In the same newspaper, there was another excellent article by Mr. Enoch Powell about the issues that are debated in Parliament these days and the nature of our debates. I had the privilege to be present in the Chamber when Enoch Powell moved a similar Bill and I can only lament that, for various reasons, we no longer have such profound debates on fundamental issues. This is the perfect time for the House to spend a little while considering the plight of babies who are never allowed to develop and be born. I refer to abortion.

The House is familiar with the arguments deployed in support of the Abortion Act 1967 when it was originally introduced. The intentions of the Act were clear at the time. My Bill would support that Act in spirit and in practice. Those who support abortion per se explain their views by saying that a woman has a right to choose and they ask what the state does with unwanted babies. Last year, 163,621 abortions were carried out in England and Wales. Did every one of those women choose not to conceive a child? Is it really possible that so many women had abortions because the risk of injury to the physical or mental health of the mother or existing children was greater than if the pregnancies were terminated? To me, that seems beyond comprehension.

The current clinical interpretation of the Abortion Act 1967, in effect, means that any woman can have a termination if she wishes as long as gestation is under 24 weeks. That fact was highlighted in the summer when a healthy twin was aborted for purely social reasons and a senior gynaecologist admitted on BBC Radio 4:

"There is abortion on demand . . . if a woman wants an abortion, she gets one".

Aborting any foetus is contrary to the original intentions of the Abortion Act of some 30 years ago, which was passed to allow abortions only in a restricted number of cases. Furthermore, with increasing evidence of the humanity of the foetus, those abortions raise serious moral and ethical issues.

Section 1(1)(a) of the Abortion Act 1967 provides no yardstick, thus allowing abortion on demand, sometimes quite late in a pregnancy as we saw with the twin who was killed after 16 weeks. In 1979, Sir Ian Percival, then the Solicitor-General, told a Standing Committee that was considering tightening the grounds for abortion that there was bound to be some risk in every continuing pregnancy, which makes nonsense of the law as it stands at present. He was discussing the inclusion of the word "substantially" before the phrase

"greater than if the pregnancy were terminated"

in order to make the test more stringent and more than merely a statistical evaluation.

While the Bill would be only a small improvement, we are still left with the words "risk" and "injury", neither of which are quantified. Having a stitch or two in the cervix could be regarded by some doctors as an injury, but it would hardly justify the killing of the child in the womb. We therefore need to make it clear that both the risk and the injury must be serious.

Evidence is emerging of the long-term damage caused by abortion, not the least of which is the possibility of breast cancer following abortion. Current figures show a 30 per cent. increase in the incidence of breast cancer among women who have had abortions. There is also evidence from all over the world of women suffering years of trauma as a result of abortions that they imagined would be simple procedures and the answer to an immediate problem. Only this month, the *British Medical Journal* carried a paper on suicide after pregnancy in Finland from 1987 to 1994. The general suicide rate in Finland for that period was 11.3 per 100,000 and the rate associated with birth was significantly lower at 5.9. However, the suicide rate associated with miscarriage was 18.1 and it soared to 34.7 for induced abortion—significantly higher than in the population at large.

Some years ago, Westminster hospital published a research paper about attempted suicides among teenagers in its catchment area. The only significant statistic to emerge was that the suicide rate was seven times greater among girls who had had abortions compared with the control group. That figure increased to nine times greater when compared with teenage girls in the population at large. The research was decried on the ground that it was statistically too small, but I have heard of no follow-up investigation. In 1992, a short-term study published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* found that 10 per cent. of women undergoing abortions suffered from psychological damage or trauma.

My Bill would not alter those sections of the Act that allow abortions in order to save the mother's life. It would not alter the sections dealing with grave and permanent injury to the mother or with the handicapped. It would tighten that part of the Act, section 1(1)(a), under which 97 per cent. of abortions are carried out. It would state quite simply that an abortion would be granted only if there was a significant risk to the mother of serious injury and if that risk was substantially greater than the risks inherent in every pregnancy. It would see an end to abortion on demand—which was never the intention of the 1967 Act. It would do what the present laws are meant to do but what they singularly fail to do: protect the woman and the child. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.52 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I rise to oppose the Bill. Abortion is an issue about which many people feel strongly—and it is not difficult to understand why. Some hon. Members hold particularly strong views on the subject and have declared their intention to use every opportunity to raise the issue on the Floor of the House. It is their right to do so, but they should appreciate—and we should remember—that, although they are very vocal, they represent a view that is held by a very small minority.

When a Sunday newspaper commissioned a MORI opinion poll following the controversy about abortions that occurred this summer, it found that 81 per cent. of respondents agreed or tended to agree with the statement:

"It is important for pregnant women to have the right to choose whether or not to continue their pregnancy".

Only 10 per cent. disagreed or tended to disagree and 9 per cent. neither agreed nor disagreed or had no opinion on the matter. The great majority of people in this country accept that abortion is regrettable but sometimes necessary.

Perhaps most people feel that way because they are sympathetic to the plight of women with problem pregnancies and they have some sense of what it might mean to force a woman to bear a child when she believes, and her doctors agree, that she could not cope. It is all very well for Members of Parliament to hold the strong view that abortion should not be allowed when a foetal abnormality is detected. They have the right to propose legislation that would prohibit such abortions. However, when we discuss such measures we should remember that we, personally, would not have to live with the consequences if the law were so amended.

It is the women denied abortion and their families who would suffer the consequences of such a restriction. Their lives—not ours—would be profoundly changed by the need to care for a child with a serious disability. In many cases, the other children in the family would suffer most. Organisations such as Support Around Termination for Foetal Abnormality, which provides counselling and assistance for those whose pregnancies are affected, know how important the option of abortion is. They know that the choice of abortion is valued even by those who choose not to take it.

Most abortions in this country are performed because the pregnancy is unwanted in circumstances where two doctors agree that it would be damaging to the mental wellbeing of the woman if she were forced to continue it. They are the abortions that some hon. Members are particularly keen to prohibit. But have they thought about what it would mean in practice? Have they thought about what it would really mean for a woman to bear a child that she desperately does not want?

Contraception is not fail-safe. Organisations such as the Birth Control Trust remind us frequently that about a third of pregnancies are conceived by women who say that they were using contraception when they became pregnant. About 50 per cent. of pregnancies are unplanned. Not all unplanned pregnancies will be unwanted, but many will be and we must think carefully about the consequences for individual women and for the whole of society if such women are forced to have those children against their will.

Motherhood is a great responsibility—it is difficult even for those who embrace it willingly. It is worth stating that no woman ever wants to have an abortion. However, many believe that it is the best solution to a dire problem. We have only to look to Northern Ireland to see what happens when legal abortion is severely restricted. Every year, more than 2,000 desperate women travel to England for the procedure. More than 4,000 women travel to England from Eire, where abortion is illegal in all circumstances. Those who

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cannot afford to travel here sometimes try to abort themselves—that is what happened in Britain before the Abortion Act 1967 allowed safe, legal abortion.

Women have consciences and so do their doctors. Abortion is not a casual choice by women who cannot be bothered to use contraception: it is the last resort of those who are pregnant and who are convinced that it would be better if the potential child were not born. It would be a tragedy for the women if the abortion law were restricted.

The Abortion Act 1967 has served women and their doctors well. Those who oppose abortion in principle like to remind us that there have been almost 4 million legal abortions since the Act became law. They sometimes claim that that is an abhorrence. It is possible to interpret that figure differently and see it as a measure of the benefit that the Act has conferred on women and their existing families: that number of abortions took place because that number was necessary for the well-being of women and their families.

The debate on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 allowed the opportunity for considerable debate about amendments to the abortion law. The issues were discussed in great detail and some changes were made to the law. The Bill that the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) seeks to put before the House is not motivated by new developments or discoveries that require the Act to be amended. Public opinion is not pressing for a change in the law. The need for abortion on the grounds that it is currently provided in this country remains as pressing today as in 1967.

It is the responsibility of those who sit in the House to draft and pass legislation that affects the everyday lives of the millions of people who live in this country. It is right that we take into account issues that are perceived to be morally difficult or troublesome, but we would be doing the women of this country a great disservice if we allowed access to safe, clinical procedure to be more restricted than it is at present. I ask the House to oppose the Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Amess, Mr. David Alton, Mr. Joe Benton, Sir Graham Bright, Mr. Edward Leigh, Mr. Thomas McAvoy, Mr. John McFall, Mr. Robert Parry, Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock, Rev. Martin Smyth, Dr. Robert Spink and Mrs. Ann Winterton.

ABORTION (AMENDMENT)

Mr. David Amess accordingly presented a Bill to amend section 1(1) of the Abortion Act 1967 in relation to the grounds on which a pregnancy may be terminated: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 January 1997, and to be printed [Bill 64].

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not the convention of the House that, if an hon. Member speaks against a ten-minute Bill, he normally votes against it? This is the second time in two weeks that those who oppose us on abortion issues have not had the nerve or the courage to force a Division. The country wants a decision on this matter, but those hon. Members have not had the nerve to force a Division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): It is a convention that hon. Members can oppose but are not obliged to vote.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I sat through the debate on the ten-minute Bill. Am I not right in thinking that the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) asked the House to oppose the excellent Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess)? She made a positive statement to that effect at the end of her speech. It is surely a waste of the House's time to make such a statement and then not carry it through to a vote.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter on which I can rule.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Further to the original point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For a long time it was a convention of the House—I have heard occupants of the Chair say this—that, if hon. Members opposed a ten-minute Bill, they had to follow their opposition through to a vote. Is that correct?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not correct. *[Interruption.]* I call the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) to order. In my time in the House and in the Chair, hon. Members on both sides of the House have opposed such Bills, but have not forced a vote.

Orders of the Day

Protection from Harassment Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

5.4 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill has one simple aim: to protect the victims of harassment.—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Will hon. Members who are leaving the Chamber please do so quietly?

Mr. Howard: In the past year, a number of highly publicised stalking cases have come to public attention. They have highlighted the need to give the courts more effective powers to deal with stalkers. The Bill covers not only stalkers, but disruptive neighbours and those who target people because of the colour of their skin.

The hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) raised the issue of stalking in the summer, with her private Member's Bill. The hon. Lady deserves to be congratulated on her initiative in raising the matter, and I do so, but there had been no opportunity to consult on her proposals, and her Bill had significant deficiencies.

The hon. Lady's Bill attempted to specify the behaviour that amounted to stalking. The conduct known as stalking can take many forms. Even though the list set out in the hon. Lady's Bill was not intended to be exhaustive, it would have served to focus the attention of the courts on the behaviour represented in it. Other types of behaviour, which might be just as distressing for the victim, might, in effect, have been excluded because of the way in which her Bill was drafted. Those points were made in response to the consultation exercise the Government carried out on our proposals. It is therefore particularly mystifying that Opposition Front Benchers have tabled amendments to this Bill that would reproduce those defects.

Furthermore, the hon. Lady's Bill created strict offences: people would have had to prove their innocence if they had carried out any of the actions described in her Bill. There were no safeguards for journalists or others whose legitimate activities were similar to the actions that amounted to stalking. Those are serious deficiencies when we are dealing with behaviour that, in many instances, is ordinary and does not merit criminalisation. It is necessary to distinguish between instances when such behaviour is acceptable and when it is not.

That was not just the Government's view. As Dr. Evonne von Heussen-Countryman, the director of the national anti-stalking and harassment campaign, said:

"A bad Bill is worse than no Bill . . . and her proposals"—

referring to the hon. Lady's Bill—

"were not precise enough. You have to be able to defend legitimate activities such as debt collecting against the stalking charge".

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Why is the Secretary of State so confident that he has now got the Bill right, given that people outside have had only 10 days to examine it and to comment on it?

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Gentleman had waited, he would have discovered that I propose to explain precisely why the Bill remedies those deficiencies. His point about the length of time that the Bill has been available is absurd, given the extent and detail of the consultation on the proposals before they were enshrined in it.

I believe that the proposals in the Bill will be effective, and will provide the protection for victims of harassment that I am sure—I think I am sure—all hon. Members want to achieve.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Home Secretary said that the Bill covers racially motivated harassment. Where exactly in the Bill does that appear?

Mr. Howard: It is not necessary to refer to racial harassment for the Bill to cover activities that constitute harassment on grounds of race as well as on other grounds.

The Bill overcomes the difficulty of defining stalking by focusing on the harmful effect that this activity has on its victims. At one level, stalkers cause their victims harassment. The Bill therefore creates civil and—in England and Wales—criminal measures to deal with situations where harassment is caused. That approach is not new—action against harassment was taken in the Public Order Act 1986—but the present Bill goes much further. It also creates a new civil tort, and provides both the civil and criminal courts with powers to make orders to protect the victims of harassment from future actions by their tormentors.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): In the light of what he has just said, can the Home Secretary explain why more than 1,000 days have passed since the first proposals were tabled in the form of amendments to the Bill that became the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 during its Committee stage? In fact, I think that some 1,016 days have passed. Why has it taken two and a half years to present these proposals to the House?

Mr. Howard: Because, as has been apparent from previous attempts to deal with it, this is a difficult matter. We were, for example, keen to learn as much as possible from experience of how such matters were dealt with overseas, to see whether we could benefit from such knowledge. We were anxious to get the proposals right.

It is no good one Opposition Member saying that the measures have been rushed through, and another saying minutes later that the process has taken far too long. We have been very careful to get our proposals right and to consult fully on them, and we are now confident that the Bill represents an effective way forward.

Dame Angela Rumbold (Mitcham and Morden): As it stands, the Bill refers to harassment or stalking that causes upset and distress. A constituent of mine is being harassed by a group of people. Will the Bill, as it were, tie up the various criminal acts to which I believe that group is subjecting my constituent? Not just one person, but a group of people, is causing considerable harassment to a single woman with a family, and I should like to be reassured that the Bill will help.

Mr. Howard: As my right hon. Friend will appreciate, it is difficult for me to give a categorical answer without

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knowing the details of the case. I can certainly confirm, however, that the Bill will cover groups of people who perpetrate such offences, as well as individuals. I hope that that gives my right hon. Friend the reassurance that she and her constituent want.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Howard: I will, but then I must make progress.

Mr. Tipping: The Home Secretary said earlier that the Bill would apply to nuisance neighbours, and then described harassment and its definition. The Bill's definition is clear: harassment is described as what a reasonable person would consider to be harassment. Many hon. Members know about nuisance neighbours, and a good many people consult them about the problem. Those people have ceased to be reasonable. I fear that the Bill is too widely drafted, and will not help in such circumstances.

Mr. Howard: I think that the hon. Gentleman is confused. Of course it is true that some people are driven by the activities of others, sometimes neighbours, to a state in which they may not have all the attitudes of a reasonable person; but that is not what the Bill refers to. The Bill lays down that the test of guilt in regard to harassment should be whether an offender is committing actions that a reasonable person in the position of the offender would expect to give rise to harassment.

The greatest difficulty that the police find in using existing legislation against stalkers is the need to prove the intention of the stalker. These provisions dispense with that requirement, so that a person who pursues a course of conduct that he ought to have known would cause harassment will commit an offence. A person ought to know that his course of conduct would amount to harassment in circumstances in which a reasonable person, in possession of the same information, would think that that course of conduct would cause the person at whom it was directed the effects of harassment, such as alarm or distress. The maximum sentence for the criminal offence of harassment will be six months' imprisonment and/or a level 5 fine.

We believe that that test gets the balance right between the need to protect victims from the destructive behaviour of stalkers and the need to prevent the courts from being used for the pursuit of frivolous claims. A victim would have to show that harassment had been caused, and that the stalker ought to have known that that would be the effect of his actions—and stalkers will no longer be able to claim as a defence that they did not intend to harass their victims.

By defining the offence in terms of the effect that the actions have on the victim, the proposals in the Bill will catch activity that causes harassment, irrespective of whether it might be termed stalking or something else. I have in mind, in particular, conduct that causes racial harassment. The Bill will catch that conduct if the conduct occurs on more than one occasion, and in circumstances in which the perpetrator ought to have known that his words or behaviour would cause harassment, alarm or distress. Similarly, those who harass their neighbours through a course of conduct would fall within the ambit of this offence, as harassment may be caused in or from a private house. The Bill therefore builds on the provisions of section 4A of the Public Order Act 1986.

The Bill also provides some specific defences. It will be a defence to show that the conduct was pursued for the prevention and detection of crime, or under an enactment or rule of law. Because of the nature of the activities pursued by stalkers, unless special provision is made, some police activities could be caught by the Bill. That, of course, is not our intention. I am also aware that the activities of journalists, salesmen, religious activists, debt collectors, private investigators and even political canvassers might fall within the scope of the Bill. We have therefore provided a defence of acting reasonably in the particular circumstances of the case in order to safeguard these legitimate activities.

We have not defined harassment itself. Harassment as a concept has been interpreted regularly by the courts since 1986. Some 100 cases were dealt with by the courts in 1995 under section 4A of the 1986 Act, 40 leading to a conviction. However, to avoid doubt, the Bill makes it clear that harassment includes causing someone alarm or distress, and that a course of conduct includes speech.

As well as the summary offence of causing harassment, the Bill creates a second, more serious, criminal offence in England and Wales—that of causing someone to fear violence. Where the level of harassment caused places someone in fear of violence being used against them, more severe penalties are required to reflect the gravity of the conduct. The maximum penalty for that offence will be five years' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine.

As I have said, the Bill creates civil and criminal measures in England and Wales. Criminal proceedings can deal only with offences that have already been committed; the criminal law cannot provide protection for someone who might reasonably expect that he or she might be subject to harassment in the future. Nor does it provide adequate protection where the evidence does not satisfy the criminal standard of proof. A conviction in criminal proceedings requires the jury or magistrates to be satisfied, beyond reasonable doubt, that the defendant committed the offence. In civil proceedings, the court needs to be satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that the defendant harassed the victim.

Civil proceedings also enable victims to be compensated for the distress and disturbance to their lives that harassment causes, just as they are when any other tort is committed. Civil proceedings would be taken by a victim, or a potential victim, where the need is to prevent the stalker from pursuing, or beginning a course of conduct. Action in the civil courts would be appropriate, for example, if just one act of harassment had taken place but there was fear that further acts would be committed, which would constitute a course of conduct. The civil courts could—if persuaded on the balance of probabilities that it was necessary to do so—grant an injunction, preventing the stalker from carrying out any specified activity which would amount to harassment. Breach of an order made under the tort

created in the Bill would, if proved beyond reasonable doubt, be a criminal offence punishable by up to five years' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine.

When dealing with criminal offences that cause harassment, or cause someone to fear violence, we need not only to punish offenders for their actions but to reassure the victim that it will not happen again. As I have just said, the civil law provides a remedy in such circumstances.

We have, however, listened carefully to people who have argued that it cannot be right in circumstances such as these to require a victim to go through a second hearing in a civil court, following a conviction in a criminal court, to gain an order preventing future harassment. We therefore think it right that criminal courts should have the power, when sentencing a person for an offence committed under the Bill, to make an order restraining a person from pursuing further conduct against the victim—or any other person named in the order—which amounts to harassment, or will cause fear of violence.

A breach of an order made under the Bill, if proved to the criminal standard—beyond reasonable doubt—will itself be a criminal offence. The offence will carry a maximum penalty of five years in prison and/or an unlimited fine. That will enable breaches to be dealt with quickly, with the involvement of the police. Where the risk to the victim is sufficiently serious, the offender can be held in custody. The breach of a civil order under the Bill may be dealt with as contempt of court rather than as a criminal matter.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): The right hon. and learned Gentleman is talking about offences committed under the Bill and the fact that a person who breaches it may then be subject to another criminal offence. What if a person is convicted under another statute, but harassment takes place afterwards? Would it be possible for the judge to inform the convicted person that, if he indulged in harassment, he would automatically be subject to another criminal offence?

Mr. Howard: I am not sure that it would be open to the judge to say anything precisely along those lines. It would of course be open to the judge, as it is at the moment, to draw the attention of someone who has been convicted and who is before him of the perils that he will face if he continues with a particular course of conduct. As I have sought to explain, there will be particular new and additional remedies available to the victim in such circumstances, but I am not sure that the precise warning that the hon. Gentleman has in mind would be the sort of language that would be likely to emanate from the judicial bench.

I have set out the aims of the Bill as it applies to England and Wales. In Scotland, the aims are identical. The existing common law in Scotland already adequately covers acts that cause harassment, so no new criminal offences are proposed. A new delict—the Scottish equivalent of a tort—is, however, provided for in the Bill.

The Government have tabled an amendment that would allow the Bill's provisions to be extended to Northern Ireland by negative resolution. It is important that the people of Northern Ireland are offered the same protection from harassment as people in the rest of the United Kingdom.

I have set out the principles that lie behind the Bill and why we believe that it will offer an effective remedy against harassment. It may help the House if I briefly explain the Bill's structure.

Clause 1 describes the course of conduct that amounts to harassment in England and Wales and sets out the defences available. Clause 2 makes it a criminal offence for a person to pursue a course of conduct in breach of clause 1. Clause 3 creates a civil tort in relation to the course of conduct described in clause 1. Clause 4 creates the more serious offence of pursuing a course of conduct that puts someone in fear of violence. Clause 5 gives criminal courts the power, when sentencing a person for an offence under clause 2 or 4, to make a restraining order.

Clause 6 provides that actions for damages under clause 3 are subject to a six-year limitation period rather than the three-year period applicable to personal injury cases. Clause 7 defines certain terms used in the earlier clauses, notably that a course of conduct is conduct that occurs on at least two occasions, and includes speech.

Clauses 8 to 11 apply to Scotland. Clause 8 creates a delict. Clause 9 provides that breach of an order made under clause 8 is a criminal offence, similar to the provisions for England and Wales. Clause 10 allows for the award of damages. Clause 11 creates the concept of a restraining order in the Scottish criminal courts.

To ensure that the work of the intelligence and security services is not compromised, clause 12 provides that the Secretary of State for the Home Department may certify, retrospectively, that a course of conduct carried out by a specified person on a specified occasion related to national security, the economic well-being of the United Kingdom, or the prevention or detection of serious crimes, and was done on behalf of the Crown.

The Bill does not bind the Crown or, therefore, agents of the Crown, so the intelligence and security services—and other investigative agencies such as customs and benefit fraud investigators pursuing their responsibilities—are exempt from its provisions. The certification procedure is intended to ensure that that exemption can be proved in the situations described, quickly and effectively.

The remaining clauses deal with the extent, commencement and short title of the Bill.

Those, then, are the Government's proposals to deal with stalking. As I have said, their effects will go beyond what might be termed classic stalking to provide protection for others who are persecuted by anti-social behaviour. The proposals are part of the Government's aim to make the streets and communities of Britain safer.

I am sorry that, despite all the fine words of the Opposition on this subject, the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has tabled amendments that would significantly weaken the Bill and reduce the protection that it would afford the public, but perhaps he will in due course be able to dispel that impression, which is certainly the impression that we have formed of the amendments that have been tabled. As always, we look forward to hearing from him and from his colleagues.

I commend the Bill to the House.

5.24 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Like the Secretary of State for the Home Department, for whom Christmas has come about a week early, I begin with a tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson), who will be winding up for the Opposition on Second Reading. Concern about stalking, the absence of any criminal remedies and the inadequacy of civil remedies has been widely held for many years. There was a debate about that in 1994 during proceedings on the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill, but it took the unusual determination and tenacity of my hon. Friend to translate that concern into a coherent Bill against stalking, which she introduced on 6 March.

For reasons that I shall come to, Ministers decided to block my hon. Friend's Bill when it was due for its Second Reading on 10 May. Prompted, I believe, by public anger at their refusal to back that Bill, on 9 July, Ministers published a consultative paper, "Stalking—The Solutions" and finally this Bill on 5 December. When it passes through the other place and becomes law early next year, my hon. Friend can feel proud of her achievement in ensuring that, at long last, people who are subject to the pain and trauma of stalking have better protection from the law than they ever did before.

We support the Bill, although we want it to be improved in Committee, and we have agreed with the Government to secure all its stages in the House today and tomorrow. Given that agreement, I was astonished—although perhaps I should never be surprised by words from the Secretary of State or his political adviser—by an accusation today in *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* that Labour was, in the Secretary of State's words, "reneging" on a promise to back the Government's anti-stalking Bill.

The Secretary of State must know that that allegation is completely untrue. He knows, because he was involved in the discussions, that the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department said that the allegation was "nasty", not an adjective that I would use. Where both sides have agreed that there will be a certain amount of time taken to get through an agreed measure, it is unacceptable for one side then to complain when the other side seeks to ensure that those undertakings are carried through. Nothing that we have done in tabling amendments to the Bill in any sense undermines the spirit and letter of our agreement to ensure that the Bill secures all its stages in the House today and in the half day tomorrow.

I understand from my hon. Friends that there have even been complaints that we have tabled amendments at all. That comes rich from a Government who have tabled five amendments to the Bill.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): To their own Bill.

Mr. Straw: Indeed.

The Secretary of State's complaint about the Bill of hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen was that it was too simplistic a solution I paraphrase to a very complicated matter. Of course we accept his injunction that it is better to have no Bill at all than a bad Bill. Given all the bad Bills that Labour Members have had to deal with week after week, I only wish that he had followed that injunction.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen introduced her Bill in March, she gave some chilling case studies of women who had been stalked. In some cases, some sort of legal sanction had finally been imposed on the stalker. In most cases, however, the stalkers had managed to evade or avoid any sanction. My hon. Friend said:

"Those who describe stalking as merely a nuisance should try speaking to a victim."

She quoted with approval the view of the Police Federation that

"it is frightening enough knowing that your every move is being watched, that you are being followed. But what if you are being trailed day after day, bombarded with unwanted letters, flowers and gifts, plagued with telephone calls and even go to collect your child from school to find a stranger has beaten you to it. It can ruin your life and"—

said the Police Federation—

"that is what is happening now to ordinary people, mainly women."—[*Official Report*, 6 March 1996; Vol. 273, c. 370.]

Given that stalking can and has ruined the lives of many ordinary people for many years, the first question before the House is why existing law has proved so inadequate to counter the crime. One reason, I suggest, is that criminal law in England and Wales has developed to deal mainly with acute incidents of criminal behaviour—a murder, a robbery, a theft and so on—but it is far less developed in dealing adequately with behaviour such as stalking or serious neighbourhood disruption, which is continuous and where the whole is infinitely worse than the sum of the parts or any individual part.

Individual acts of stalking such as those mentioned by the Police Federation—the odd letter of affection or the occasional bouquet of flowers—may be no more than eccentric, and should not bring down the force of the criminal or civil law. What causes the intense distress and so marks out stalking is the persistence and continuity of the conduct.

A similar situation exists in relation to anti-social behaviour by neighbours. In a densely populated island like Britain, we must all accept that life in cities and towns will not always be peace and quiet. Most of us are willing to tolerate the occasional noisy disruption from neighbours; but when disruption becomes continuous and when those causing it ignore reasonable requests to desist and intimidate those who dare to complain, the effect, like that of stalking, shifts from being an occasional nuisance to a continuous nightmare

In the past, such continuous, chronic criminal behaviour has generally been dealt with informally through community pressure, or perhaps by the informal intervention of the police, rather than through the formal involvement of the criminal law.

When the criminal justice system has tried to deal with stalking or neighbour harassment, on the whole it has failed. That its because it has tended to chop up the continuous film of persistent misbehaviour into individual, discrete snapshots. Furthermore, as the Secretary of State mentioned, it has been required to prove intent. In other words, the criminal justice system has sought to turn a chronic condition into a series of acute ones.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen sought to fill the gap in respect of stalking with the Bill that she introduced in March. Her Bill prohibited

individuals from a "course of conduct" likely to cause a person to feel harassed, alarmed or distressed so as to fear for his or her safety, or that of a linked third person, such as a child. In our view, my hon. Friend's Bill got to the heart of the mischief of stalking. With just a modicum of good will from Ministers, drafting amendments could have been made to her Bill and it could have been on the statute book last summer. The necessary protection for victims of stalking could already have been law.

That was not the first time that the Government had blocked action against stalking. In 1994 and again in 1995, Ministers dead-batted calls for stalking to be tackled, using as their reason the fact that they were conducting a study of anti-stalking laws and definitions in other countries. That was the essence of the answers given to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on 17 July 1995 and to my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) on 6 February this year.

That study into other countries seems to have led Ministers to a negative conclusion. Other countries with anti-stalking measures, such as Canada, New Zealand and Australia, have each, I understand, used fairly specific definitions. The Bill, however, provides a much looser, more general definition of harassment, with the intention that over time the courts will gradually fill in the gaps by helping to define the test of reasonable knowledge in clause 1(2) and the defence of reasonableness in subsection (3), and to develop the tort of harassment provided in clause 3.

I understand the Government's intentions. Having myself, like the Secretary of State, been brought up in the English legal tradition, I have enormous respect for the intellectual ingenuity of the common law and for our courts' capacity to grow great oaks of jurisprudence from the smallest shoots. But a balance must be struck, especially in the criminal law, between an offence general enough to deal effectively with the mischief complained of, and an offence so vague that in practice courts will not convict.

For that reason, we favour a belt-and-braces approach in the Bill, unless we are persuaded to the contrary by the wisdom of the Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean). We do not seek to disturb the general definition in clause 1. However, without prejudice to the generality of that definition, which is important to our amendment, we believe that the Bill should give some detail of the circumstances in which stalking may arise. That is the purpose of our amendment, which can be considered in more detail in Committee on the Floor of the House later today.

In May this year the Secretary of State wrote to me to explain why the Government would not support the Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen. The Minister of State wrote to my hon. Friend in the same terms. The objection then, which I ask my hon. Friends to note carefully, was that the scope of my hon. Friend's Bill was too wide. Today we hear that the objection to my hon. Friend's Bill was that the scope of her Bill was too narrow. I am confused, as is the Secretary of State, I think.

The Secretary of State went on the record in *The Times* today with the churlish and nonsensical allegation that we would seek to block progress on what amounts to my hon. Friend's Bill. He said that our proposals

> "would significantly reduce the public's protection from harassment."

The Secretary of State owes it to the House to tell us, when he winds up the debate, which of his objections to my hon. Friend's Bill is correct. Was it his objection in May, when he said that her Bill was too wide, or is it his objection today, when he says that it was too narrow? The two statements cannot both be correct.

Ministers claimed in the *Daily Mail* today that the Suzy Lamplugh Trust opposed the provisions that we put forward in one of the amendments.

Mr. Howard: I should not want to put the hon. Gentleman to the inconvenience of waiting for the explanation that he seeks, so I am happy to give it to him now. Both criticisms are valid. The hon. Lady's Bill was too narrow for the reason that I advanced in my remarks earlier this afternoon: because the Bill provided a list, there was a danger that stalking would be interpreted exclusively by reference to that list. As I also explained, the hon. Lady's Bill was too wide because it covered activities of people such as journalists and political canvassers, who were not provided with the defence of acting reasonably in all the circumstances, which the Government's proposals provide. Those criticisms are valid, and I hope that that provides the hon. Gentleman with the explanation that he sought.

Mr. Straw: Once before, I advised the Secretary of State that, when he is in a hole, he should stop digging. I repeat that advice. I have the letter sent to my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen by the Minister of State, Home Office. It does not mention the concern expressed by the Home Office back in May that the Bill was too narrow. The letter merely alleges that the Bill was too wide. That could have been dealt with satisfactorily if Ministers had tabled amendments to the Bill to provide more adequate defences.

On the Secretary of State's second point—he made it today through his mouthpiece, the *Daily Mail*—our amendment, which incorporates the particulars contained in the Bill sponsored by my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen, does not affect the generality of the Secretary of State's proposals. That fact is stated in our amendment.

I am sorry to disappoint the Secretary of State with the news that he and the *Daily Mail* were misinformed about the views of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust. Yesterday, the trust seemed to criticise Labour by stating:

> "Mr. Blair had got it wrong."

I have a message from the Suzy Lamplugh trust, to my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen, which states:

> "I would like to apologise for problems caused as a result of the statement in the *Daily Mail* today from The Suzy Lamplugh Trust . . . At the time of speaking to the *Daily Mail* yesterday, I misunderstood the intention of the amendments within the Bill".

I am not surprised that the person who wrote that misunderstood the amendments, as the amendments' details were explained to her by someone on the *Daily Mail*, which is not known as one of the primary organs of truth in our society.

Mr. Howard: Have you cleared that with Blair?

Mr. Straw: The one certainty—perhaps the only certainty—about the press at the next general election is

[Mr. Straw]

that the *Daily Mail* will not support the Labour party. Support from *The Daily Telegraph* is questionable, and it is certainly questionable from *The Sun*, *The Times* and the *Daily Star*. But I think that we can say with some certainty that the *Daily Mail* will support the Conservative party. Indeed, I would be profoundly shocked if that certainty in my life was not the case—*[Interruption.]* This is rebuttal.

The message from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust continues:

"The Trust is very pleased that Labour are still working to improve the Bill",

and states that it supports the amendments tabled by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen.

All the amendments tabled by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen aim to strengthen and improve the Bill. We want civil and criminal courts to be given powers to order offenders to undertake counselling, to make them confront their offending behaviour. That provision would be piloted before being introduced on a nationwide basis. We also believe that, in certain circumstances, better protection is necessary for stalking victims who are used as witnesses, and that civil courts' duties in relation to injunctions should be made clear in the Bill.

As a common lawyer, I confess no detailed knowledge of Scots law—I profess virtually no knowledge, as it is drawn from a very different legal tradition. However, my hon. Friends representing seats north of the border have told me that reliance in Scotland on its—albeit different—breach of the peace provisions to control stalking is not satisfactory. That is why my hon. Friends desire the inclusion into Scots law of a separate, parallel statutory offence. I should make it clear that, with regret, we do not support the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), because they would require proof of intent and subjective knowledge. As I have told him, we shall vote against his amendments if they are pushed to a Division.

When the Bill was published, and again today, the Secretary of State claimed that it would also help to deal with the mounting problem of criminal anti-social behaviour by neighbours. Those of us who for years have been calling—although on deaf ears—for Government action against the growing problem of neighbourhood harassment should have uttered hallelujahs at the Government's change of tack, and reminded ourselves of the need to be charitable to sinners, such as the Secretary of State, who have repented. I should also mention the extent to which the Government have for so long denied that the issue presents any problem that makes any amendment to the law worthy, and the fact that, given the scale of the problems, the remedy offered by the Bill is entirely inadequate.

In June 1995, after months of consultation with local authorities and others, on behalf of the Labour party I published a document entitled "A Quiet Life", which outlined detailed proposals to deal with problem of criminal anti-social neighbours. That document contained some alarming case histories and discussed the serious defects in current law. We proposed a new form of injunction to deal with the problem—a community safety order—which could be obtained by the police or by the local council, acting on behalf of victims. Thus, we proposed to mix the best of civil and of criminal law. It would be a civil remedy, in the form of an injunction, which would be enforced by the criminal law if it were breached.

The Government's reaction to our proposals at that stage was revealing. It revealed their profound complacency and the "not invented here" attitude which has cost them so dear in public support. Instead of the slightest acknowledgement that there was a problem that required a solution, there was contemptuous dismissal. When the draft proposals were published, in June 1995, the Prime Minister sought to dismiss them as

"merely window dressing".—*[Official Report*, 22 June 1995; Vol. 262, c. 472.]

In September 1996, the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration described our proposals as "unnecessary", claiming that

"measures already exist to deal with problems".

I do not know of a single victim of serious harassment by bad neighbours in my constituency or in any constituency who believes that current law is adequate to deal with his or her problem. Those dismissals of our proposals were a grave error by Ministers, because they simply revealed one fact: Ministers planned to do nothing to deal with the problem. They planned to do nothing to help people whose lives were being ruined by anti-social behaviour, and nothing to assist local authorities which were struggling to use the wholly inadequate remedies in current law.

As on the issues of knives, paedophiles and stalking, Ministers eventually woke up to the fact that the Opposition had identified a serious problem that required action. As is often the case, however, their remedies are too little, too late. Considered in conjunction with the provisions of the Housing Act 1996, their proposals fail in many key respects to measure up to the scale of the problem of criminal anti-social behaviour by bad neighbours.

The powers in the 1996 Act apply only to tenants and not to all tenants in an area, whereas evidence shows that, in many areas, the anti-social behaviour of residents in owner-occupied housing can be just as damaging as the behaviour of those who are council, housing association or private tenants. The defective power to intervene given to local authorities under section 222 of the Local Government Act 1972—which has been highlighted by the problems that Coventry has had in the Finnie case—remains unamended.

Even more importantly, civil remedies provided by this Bill are available only at the suit of the individual victim—which I think was the gravamen of the intervention by the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold) on the speech of the Secretary of State. The Bill's provisions do not take proper account of the huge pressures that victims experience, and therefore of the need for police and councils to act together to secure community safety for the residents of a specific area. That is why our proposals do not place the duty on individual victims, who are often so intimidated that they are frightened—like many of my hon. Friends, I have witnessed the fear of constituents—that they will not make a complaint, and are even less willing to become the principal prosecution witness in a criminal prosecution.

The Bill does not contain even the weaker provision—which the parallel provision in section 60 of the Family Law Act 1996 does—for court rules enabling third parties

to bring proceedings. I should tell the House that, had there been time—we accept that there is not—for the matter to be properly and fully examined in Standing Committee, we certainly would have moved detailed amendments to remedy the serious defects that we have found in that section of the Bill.

In August 1996, the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) said that the Government had "lost the plot" on law and order. The Government's indecision and uncertainty on stalking is just one illustration of why his damning conclusion about his Front-Bench colleagues was correct. First, they prevaricated for two years; then they blocked the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen without adequate justification; then, as was no doubt his intention when he blocked the Bill in May, the Home Secretary went to his party conference not to thank my hon. Friend for bringing the matter into the public domain, but to proclaim the Bill on stalking as his invention. He said:

"We need quick and effective remedies for the less serious cases, and tough sanctions for the most serious."

He went on:

"I can announce that we shall have them. Women deserve that protection; they need that protection; and I will make sure they get it."

The implication was that the Government would sponsor the Bill. Unfortunately, the legislative programme announced in the Loyal Address did not bear the promise out. Instead, two days before the Queen's Speech, we were told—again by a newspaper, not by the Home Secretary—that the Bill would be left to the lottery of the private Member's Bill procedure. I then made the Home Secretary a clear and specific offer of co-operation on getting a Government Bill through the House. That offer was rejected.

On the day of the Queen's Speech—I am glad to see that the Home Secretary is smiling about this—Ministers spent all day until 3.30 pm in radio and television studios, defending the decision to turn what would have been a Government Bill into a private Member's Bill. As we all remember, during his speech on the Loyal Address, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgemoor—[HON. MEMBERS: "Sedgefield."] My right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) repeated the offer that I had made only two days before—an offer that had been rejected.

We then witnessed the extraordinary spectacle of an impromptu meeting of the Cabinet's legislation Committee on the Treasury Bench.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): Decisive leadership.

Mr. Straw: "Decisive leadership," says one of the devils on the Treasury Bench. The Prime Minister suddenly decided to overrule his Home Secretary again and make the Bill a Government Bill. By the end of the Prime Minister's speech on the Loyal Address, the Home Secretary's demeanour gave every indication that he had been subject to persistent and wanton harassment by his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and wished for legal protection from it.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition told the House on 23 October that we would co-operate to get the measure on the statute book quickly. We are doing that. The worst is that, if the Government had shown the House the same co-operation then as we are showing now, a comprehensive Bill against stalking could have been law six months ago. Who knows how many people could have been protected during that interval if the Government had done then what we are doing now?

5.52 pm

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): I offer ungrudging support for the Bill, following what we have heard from the Opposition. I was under the impression that we were uniting in an effort to put on the statute book a measure that is required by the people of this country. The Government have responded to public opinion, and it would have improved the reputation of the House if all hon. Members had given the Bill the whole-hearted support that it deserves.

I have some short points to make about the Bill. It is really two measures in one. First, it is a response to a number of highly publicised and serious offences of what has come to be called stalking. Secondly, our fellow citizens have a far wider need for protection from activities that are not necessarily of that type, but are straightforward harassment, when individuals or groups pick on others because of some perceived weakness, putting them in fear. We must stress the fact that the Bill will give an opportunity to deal with many incidents of harassment, as well as its primary aim of dealing with the dreadful cases of women being stalked.

Men also require protection from harassment. On some occasions, men in the public eye, perhaps in the world of entertainment, need protection from neurotic women, who can be just as much of a nuisance to them and just as disruptive of their lives as some men can be to women.

Some decades ago, the House took away the protection provided for those faced with harassment during industrial disputes when it abandoned the old concept of a criminal offence of watching and besetting. I recall that being taken from the statute book. I felt at the time that the offence should not have been removed. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has said, when people are watched, they are afraid, their lives are disrupted and they are unable to function normally in their ordinary family lives. I am pleased that the Bill will restore that concept. I trust that it will be used in the old-fashioned context. Those who do not want to take part in industrial disputes are as entitled to protection from harassment as are those who are the object of sexual admiration from unwanted sources.

We may well find that the Bill will be particularly significant for younger persons. Violence among young people seems to be increasing. Those in vulnerable minorities are subject to continual, progressive harassment. One minority group—those who are seen as ethnically different from the majority group in the area—has already been mentioned, but those whose other activities may be regarded as different are also affected. Such people may simply attend the wrong school, or join the boy scouts, or they may simply be young people who behave themselves and do not wish to join gangs and other groups. I trust that the Bill will make it possible to deal with those above the age of criminal responsibility who are not yet adults. The Bill refers to "persons". That includes teenagers, who have just as much right to go about their business as do those over the age of 18.

[Mr. Peter Griffiths]

While I support the Bill entirely, I have one other point to raise that may create a problem when the measure is enacted; many of those who carry out harassment are mentally disturbed. I have some doubts as to whether those who carry out repeated acts of harassment will be prevented from continuing by the taking out of a court order to desist. They will end up in prison. We already know that the key reason for many people being convicted and sent to prison is mental instability. Very little provision is made for them in prison to ensure that, when they leave the institution, they have been cured of the problem that took them there.

I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) talk about the need for counselling. We must go beyond that. We need an educative process for those subject to an injunction and, perhaps, for those in prison. The matter will not be solved simply by issuing an order and sending the offender to gaol for a period.

The Bill deserves the House's whole-hearted support. I trust that we shall achieve unanimity in Committee and that it will quickly reach the statute book to provide protection for our constituents who suffer from harassment.

5.59 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): The hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) gave his ungrudging support to the Bill, but half his speech was mild criticism. I give my ungrudging support and do not feel guilty about offering some suggestions. There is remarkable unanimity and homogeneity in a parliamentary assembly that is not noted for taking such an approach. Opposition Members do not have to sacrifice their critical faculties to avoid being accused of not favouring the Bill.

I very much welcome the Bill and the Home Secretary's introductory remarks, which explained not only that it will apply to stalked women and men but that it has a racial dimension and that it can be used to deal with obstreperous neighbours. All hon. Members know from their surgeries of people who have been stalked, if that is the right word, by next-door neighbours who apply exceptional pressure to them. I also welcome the Home Secretary's remarks about the application of the legislation to group harassment; cases need not involve only one person doing the harassing.

I am delighted that, at long last, this measure is about to reach the statute book. It does not imply hostility to say that we must be careful because experience shows that we are not always brilliant legislators. For various reasons, political and otherwise, there is an element of haste in what we are doing. I hope that the Minister and my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) will say that, if parts of the legislation prove to be inappropriate, there will be opportunities to revisit the matter. If we pass legislation swiftly, it is incumbent on us to remedy, where feasible, any glaring weaknesses that, in legislating speedily, we have overlooked. I suspect that Members of the other place will earn their per diem allowances by using their expertise in scrutinising the Bill to supplement our expertise.

Stalking has increased in recent years. A growing number of women, and some men, are subject to varying degrees of harassment from individuals who pursue them. That involves not only television and film celebrities but ordinary members of the public. The excellent briefing produced by the Library describes the remedies, but it is obvious from recent well-publicised cases that both the criminal and civil law are inadequate. People rightly expect us to legislate to protect victims of what is, regrettably, a growing menace.

Last year, I attended a conference in the United States that had a session devoted to stalking. It was organised by the American Society for Industrial Security, the largest professional association of people involved in investigation and security. As one would expect, much research is being done in the United States. It is important not only that we should consider legislation in other countries but that we consider research elsewhere into the phenomenon of stalking.

Among the papers presented at the conference were useful documents on what is being done in the United States, especially in the Los Angeles police department. The LAPD has not been above criticism of late, but it seems to be a leader in this field. It set up a threat management unit 1990 to investigate in the long term the normal patterns of threat. It has offered considerable advice to officers on how to deal with stalking.

The research suggests that, unless one appreciates the different sorts of stalking, one will not necessarily use the right methods to tackle it: it goes into detail about erotomanic, love obsessional, and simple obsessional cases. It is important for the police to know how to deal with harassment, not simply from the perspective of dealing with the perpetrator but from that of dealing sensitively with people who are being harassed, or who allege that they are being harassed. Such people require much information and support to help them to deal with what can be a horrifying experience.

Several strategies have been devised for police and victims to pursue, to try to prevent stalkers from continuing to stalk. With measures such as this, there is a danger that there will be a spate of complaints, many of which will be valid and require the assistance of psychiatrists, the police and the courts. However, there will be some cases where people do not understand the legislation, refuse to understand it, or try to take advantage of it. They could place enormous pressure on the police and the courts to deal with cases that should never have got near the courts, which could become clogged up. There is potential for people to use the new legislation wrongly. That is why it is important that the police should know how to deal with different sorts and levels of complaints or incidents.

The LAPD's idea is to educate victims about stalking and its wider dimension so that they can be apprised realistically of what the police and the authorities can do. It is right to advise victims of stalking about means of modifying their behaviour and patterns of movement, if necessary, to minimise risk, such as changing telephone numbers or moving, although the latter is a sign of failure. Therapeutic strategies can be devised to help victims deal better with the phenomenon.

It is also important—some people may think that it is not the purpose of legislation, but I believe that it should be—to consider how the police should deal with alleged perpetrators. There are a variety of ways. Often in the United States, private investigators are involved. Much more must be done than confronting stalkers with a knee

in the groin and the threat of further physical retribution. Los Angeles police say that they can write to or telephone alleged stalkers and apply for temporary restraining orders preventing them from making contact with victims. They can use arrest and detention or what they call mental health diversion. Finally, they can seek criminal conviction. Their approach has reduced the number of allegations of stalking to more manageable proportions, to advantage.

I suspect, and fervently hope, that the Home Secretary and the Minister will be able to tell us about research being conducted by the police and by the excellent research department in the Home Office, and about funding for academic research into the phenomenon of stalking. Unless we can comprehend the phenomenon, legislation will miss the mark and we will not achieve our objectives. It can be dramatically demonstrated that an aggressive intervention posture by the police can be effective, and I hope that the police are pursuing the matter.

I am not declaring an interest, but the Minister and I have long had an interest in the regulation of the private security industry—that has been a totally abortive venture for the past 17 years, but there is still hope—and one element that requires regulation is the profession of private investigators. The profession is used by a wide variety of individuals and organisations and, at the respectable end, is pursued by many people, mostly ex-CID, with diligence and competence.

Private investigation may not be the nicest profession but, like politics, it is necessary. At the bad end there are crooks, or men who have become crooked, deploying tactics that are clearly reprehensible and illegal. I have had discussions with the representative organisations and I have had a partial assurance from the Home Secretary. Although there are certain defences open to investigators, if they fail in the task of surveillance and are spotted, either they are poor investigators or the subject has been clever or lucky enough to spot them.

I seek assurances from the Minister, either in his speech or in response to amendments, that the legislation will not be applied to those at the legitimate end of the private investigation profession. There are, quite rightly, protections for the intelligence services and the police and for reputable investigators who might be employed by a myriad Government Departments.

In some cases there will be levels of harassment far in excess of the instructions given to investigators. Those who are the subject of scrutiny may not endorse what I say. I am sure that there will be a tiny minority of cases of over-vigilant investigators and I hope that the protection will not provide a defence for someone who is clearly guilty.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): The hon. Gentleman is in slight danger of misleading himself, and I think that I can help him. The Secretary of State's certificate is available to agents of the Crown; it would not be available to cover private investigators. In addition, there is a defence for people acting in the course of a legitimate trade or profession, provided that they act reasonably; if they act, as the hon. Gentleman said, far in excess of what is necessary, they will be caught by the Bill.

Mr. George *rose*

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the principle of clandestine surveillance is that it should not be detected by the subject? There is a requirement in the Bill that there have to have been at least two prior incidents. He and I share a concern with the private security industry, but does he accept that it would be an extremely inept investigator who became subject to the Bill or that, alternatively, there would have to have been a deliberate use of obvious surveillance as a form of harassment?

Mr. George: I am grateful for both those interventions. The Minister reminded me of something of which I was already aware. I am sorry if he gained the impression that I was not. I know full well that the certificate is available to employees of the Crown.

Not all the work of investigators involves wearing a dirty mac and using binoculars, videos or cameras; they pursue many open activities that do not rely on furtive or clandestine behaviour. I recently read an article dividing the investigation profession into 28 different sectors.

I know of several cases, also, in which filming has been done with the acquiescence of the person under surveillance. There was a case involving Manchester council two or three years ago, when it hired an investigator to follow a guy who had put in a claim for £100,000 compensation for an injury: the investigator went on a holiday tour with him and filmed him on a daily basis. One could say that that was not clandestine.

The Bill contains some imprecise references to reasonableness or the pursuit of crime, but perhaps a little more clarity would give greater reassurance to those who are pursuing investigations in a legitimate fashion. It is obvious that some activities of investigators are legal and that occasionally some investigators behave in a way that is absolutely illegal, but the problem is that there is a grey area in the middle that may not be accounted for in the Bill.

A great deal of investigators' work relates to non-criminal activities. A political party, for example, could employ investigators to check on the validity of prospective parliamentary candidates before endorsement. The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department is looking at me with incredulity. Perhaps we could have a chat afterwards, because I think that he has not quite got it right.

Investigators can pursue a variety of activities that are not related to criminal behaviour: the eviction of anti-social neighbours, for example. Local authorities are increasingly looking to private investigators to become professional witnesses and gather evidence to secure an eviction. To do that would require the investigator to keep the neighbours under surveillance, take their photograph and film and follow them. The ultimate aim is not a criminal prosecution but an eviction. If neighbours who were being investigated discovered the fact, they might be able to rush to the courts to seek protection.

I have mentioned the vetting of potential and existing staff. Other investigations that do not lead to criminal prosecutions can involve matrimonial matters, intellectual property, missing persons, debt recovery and many other issues. Sometimes, investigations are part of civil proceedings, but they often do not even lead to that. I therefore ask the Minister at some stage to comment with greater clarity on why he thinks that the Bill as it stands would adequately protect a professionally qualified person in going about his or her professional duties.

[Mr. George]

The Bill is overdue. I am glad that there is not much acrimony over it, apart from some ritualistic criticisms. It is clearly very important that the Bill is passed and that what we pass achieves our objectives. I only hope that, if deficiencies are discovered after Royal Assent, the Government and the Opposition—whoever they may be—will have the good grace to recognise that mistakes have been made and try to remedy them.

6.20 pm

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): If any justification were needed for the argument that we should think before we leap into making legislation, the Bill supplies it. The Stalking Bill, presented by the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson), which undoubtedly helped to concentrate the Government's minds on the need for a law against stalking—she should be commended for her efforts—was certainly an important step in the right direction. I was happy to encourage her in introducing that Bill, which she has acknowledged and will probably do so again—although whether she does so to embarrass me or not, I do not yet know.

The hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen would not and certainly should not pretend that her Bill is better than the Protection from Harassment Bill. Although, as has already been said, the words of the director of the National Anti-Stalking and Harassment Campaign, Dr. von Heussen-Countryman, to the effect that a bad Bill is worse than no Bill, might have been a somewhat harsh criticism of the Stalking Bill, there can be no doubt that, taking the two Bills side by side, the Bill before us today is an improvement.

I do not think that it was reasonable—it may of course have just been party political posturing—for the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) to complain about the Government's Bill in the terms that he did. It is even less reasonable for him to complain and then support the Bill in the Lobby, as I understand he is going to do. One example of the total unreasonableness, indeed, absurdity, of his comments was to say that the Government were confused in their criticism of the Stalking Bill in saying one moment that it was too wide and in another that it was too narrow. If one has a bird brain, one might think that there is some merit in such a comment, yet it is total nonsense.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made clear when he helpfully came to the Dispatch Box to stop any more nonsense being perpetrated, when he said that the Stalking Bill was too wide, it was because it would have caught people such as journalists, and when he later said that it was too narrow, he was commenting in a completely different sense. It became obvious as the Bill formulated in the Government's minds that it could be used for wider purposes than dealing just with stalkers. I cannot honestly believe that the hon. Member for Blackburn is so obtuse that he did not realise the distinction. He was just doing what he is now getting used to as we approach the general election: causing mischief.

The letter that my right hon. Friend the Minister wrote in May, to which the hon. Member for Blackburn referred, was obviously written before the Government issued their consultation paper, received their many responses, thought further about the matter and realised that the Bill could be broadened. What on earth is wrong with that? It is time that the Opposition stopped grubbing around to draw distinctions between Labour and Conservative. Either they support our policy, which would be novel, or they oppose it. They must make up their minds and stop standing on their heads and pretending that there is some great distinction between themselves and the Government if they are to help us to introduce sensible legislation.

The Bill is better than the Stalking Bill for a number of obvious reasons. It covers a wider number of offences: not only stalking, but bad neighbours and racial harassment. It is better because it is more precise about the offences, separating harassment from violence and the consequences of the two, which are widely different. It is better because it is more precise about the defences—which is very important—including legitimate surveillance, which the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) mentioned. The Bill is better and will therefore lead to less confusion in the courts.

There is no doubt that the obnoxious activity of stalking needed to be dealt with. More and more terrifying instances were coming to light and being publicised in the newspapers, and it was becoming more and more obvious that the existing law was thoroughly inadequate to deal with them. People have been followed for months and months by harassers, and instances of endless telephone calls at all times of the day and night, causing immense misery, have arisen. Misery was being caused by stalkers with whom the women involved had never had a relationship. The misery of parents worried about paedophiles stalking school playgrounds, and the courts being seemingly incapable of dealing with it, was beginning to emerge, too.

The Government did not just produce a Bill; they considered the Stalking Bill and earlier debates on stalking, they thought about the problem, produced a consultation paper, listened to the representations made to them, and improved on their first thoughts, which should be welcomed, not scorned, by the Labour party.

What needed to be done to protect women—as my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) pointed out, the issue does not exclusively affect women—from stalkers? We needed the threat of criminal proceedings in order to deter would-be offenders, and if they were not deterred, we needed to protect the victims by imprisoning stalkers if they were caught and convicted. We clearly needed such a law. We needed a different approach to the different kinds of stalking; we needed to distinguish between those who are just a nuisance, which is bad enough, and those who threaten violence and cause fear. We needed to recognise that some offenders act deliberately, believing that they are causing misery and knowing the effect of it, and some are sick and demented and honestly do not intend to cause misery. If the latter type of offender nevertheless causes misery by their actions, they cannot be caught, convicted and sentenced under the existing legislation.

There was a need not just to punish offenders but to prevent them offending in the first place. There was a need therefore not just for a criminal offence but a civil wrong, which can offer an injunction. If such an injunction is breached, it can be followed up by criminal sanctions. There was a need for defences to protect journalists. Some of us would wish that all journalists

were not protected under the Bill, but journalists have a job to do, and as long as they do it in the confines of decency and restraint, they should be allowed to do so. If the Bill were too widely drafted, they would fall foul of it.

What about political canvassers? We call time and again at people's doors. First they are out; the second time they do not want to talk to us; the third time we do not have the answers to their questions; if they still want to talk to us the fourth time that we call, it is probably because we have those answers. We may even return a fifth or a sixth time to get some money from them. That might be considered harassment in some circumstances.

A harassment Bill must ensure that such nonsense does not take place—that is, not the nonsense of political canvassing, but the nonsense of prosecutions for political canvassing. There are also debt collectors, and the people who have already been mentioned, who are engaged in genuine surveillance. All those needs and approaches have helped to form the Bill, and that is thoroughly to be welcomed.

An undoubted improvement is the widening of the concept of stalking to cover harassment by neighbours, and racial harassment. Problems concerning bad neighbours are mentioned more often at my weekly surgeries now. In the old days we heard complaints about the inadequacy of social welfare and benefits, but the Government have been generous and such complaints have tailed off. More and more of the complaints that I hear from my constituents are about their bad neighbours.

We write to the local authority, but the authority says that it has no powers to do anything about bad neighbours. The Government have already passed a law to define some kinds of noise as a nuisance, but that is not always adequate, because the harassment does not always take the form of noise. Now we are introducing a measure that will give local authorities that run council housing estates another series of weapons to threaten those appalling people who make their neighbours' lives impossible.

Mr. McNamara: The hon. Gentleman talks about all the extra powers for local authorities, but local authorities will not get the extra money that they need to use those powers to enforce the legislation, or to employ the necessary people.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: That, as the hon. Gentleman must be aware, is totally irrelevant to the point that I am making. Perhaps he can raise it on the Adjournment of the House. He certainly may not raise it further in the middle of my speech.

I especially welcome the Government's move to deal further with the scourge of racism. The 1994 report by the Select Committee on Home Affairs made 38 recommendations for dealing with that serious problem, and I remember taking action against my own Government for not going far enough in accepting those recommendations, and for not proposing to deal more strongly with racism in response to our report.

Our recommendation 29 reads as follows:

"We recommend that the Public Order Act 1986 should be amended so that (a) section 6(4) should no longer require the prosecution to prove that the offender either intended to cause harassment or was aware that harassment may result, but instead should require the prosecution to prove that a reasonable person would have expected harassment, alarm or distress to be caused by his actions, (b) section 5(4) should allow a police officer to arrest on the basis of reasonable suspicion that an offence had been or was about to be committed, and (c) in section 5(6) the penalty should be increased to include a sentence of up to 12 months imprisonment, a more substantial fine, or both. We consider that these amendments will allow the courts to take into consideration and deal more effectively with those expressions of racism accompanying criminal acts to which we refer in paragraph 86."

I hope that I do my right hon. Friend the Minister of State no injustice, but I seem to remember that at the time he said that it was not possible to go further along the lines of the Committee's recommendations. I now warmly commend him and thank him for moving considerably further along those lines in the Bill, which, by extending the concept of stalking, deals with racial harassment. As a result there will be more weapons in the armoury of the criminal justice system for dealing with something that, when we seek to live together in a decent society, is one of the most insidious and hateful forms of human behaviour.

It is not only the victims of stalkers who have reason to thank the Government for the Bill. Harassed neighbours, whose numbers must run into thousands, if my constituency is anything to go by, and the racially harassed, of whom there must also be thousands, have reason to thank them too. So do all those who seek to bring order and justice to our society—whether that means the police, the probation service, the magistrates or the judges—and therefore the British public, who yearn for a society in which there is more law and order. I commend the Government for bringing forward a Bill that fulfils those wishes.

6.35 pm

Mrs. Diana Maddock (Christchurch): Although the Bill is generally perceived to be about stalking, its tentacles are likely to spread far wider. In some ways it is like four Bills rolled into one—an anti-stalking Bill, a feuding neighbours Bill, a domestic violence Bill and a Bill that extends civil injunction remedies in such cases to the criminal courts.

It is therefore all the more disappointing and worrying that the timetable means that the Bill will be taken through all its stages in little more than 24 hours, on two consecutive days. My hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) has already made his views clear on that subject. Shortly before coming into the Chamber, I discovered that the Government may even be minded to push the whole thing through in one day.

During the debate on the Queen's Speech when my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) pledged to the Prime Minister my party's co-operation in the passage of the Bill, we did not envisage such a compacted and rushed debate. In my view, an attempt has been made to take advantage of our good will and concern.

We have heard that line already this afternoon. People have said that Opposition Members are against the Bill and are not co-operating, but "co-operating" does not mean failing to scrutinise the legislation properly.

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Lady says that there is a tight timetable for pushing the Bill through, but she should revise her opinion. As I understand it, two days have been allocated for debate, should that be necessary, although

[Mr. Maclean]

I hope that we shall not need the full time. I should have thought that that was ample time in which to scrutinise the legislation properly.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Gary Streeter): We can go through the night if the hon. Lady likes.

Mrs. Maddock: I hear facetious comments about sitting through the night. That is not what I meant. I believe that dealing with the Bill in such a short time will prevent all but the most rushed consultation. Drafting changes between Second Reading and Committee, and between Committee and Report, are part and parcel of the passage of most Bills through the House, and we all believe that they are the better for it. Clearly that will not happen in this case.

We would like several improvements to be made to the Bill. I have tabled amendments accordingly, and I hope that the Minister will respond sympathetically to them when the time comes. I am a little disappointed that an amendment that I tabled to allow a breach of a civil undertaking to be treated as an offence has not been selected. I believe that such a provision could save lengthy and complex legal arguments, and could take some of the acrimony out of cases, especially domestic violence cases.

I am advised that such a use of undertakings with legal force behind them could be extended to the criminal courts, too. In view of what the Minister has already said, I hope that he and his civil servants will consider the scope for the use of undertakings in both civil and criminal courts in the context of the Bill. I hope that we shall hear some response to that suggestion during our proceedings tonight.

I now move to a second area where we on the Liberal Democrat Benches are looking for some improvement. [HON. MEMBERS: "We?"] There are 26 of us somewhere in the building. As the Bill is drafted, the court cannot give any protection to victims pending the trial—which may be months away—short of remanding someone in custody, which would be expensive, or making it a bail condition, which does not carry the same full protection as the restraining order provisions in clause 5 from the time of sentencing onwards.

I hope that the Minister will consider whether it is possible to enable the court to make such an order when a trial is pending. One possible use of such an order would be to enable the court to make an order while proceedings are adjourned indefinitely, with the prospect perhaps of the defendant never having to come to court. The victim, therefore, would never have to relive the ordeal in the witness box. That would give the substantial protection of an explicit order, backed up with five years' imprisonment.

Given the wide scope of the Bill, I was surprised to read that the Government expect approximately 200 additional criminal cases a year to arise from it. Do the Government really believe that only four additional cases a week will arise in the whole of England and Wales as a result of the Bill? I can only imagine that they are considering only stalking cases and ignoring the wider effects of the Bill, which have been described fairly graphically this evening.

I have been advised by a lawyer active in this field that once the extent of the Bill is known there will be immense pressure on the police to take up the proceedings, particularly in neighbour disputes and domestic violence cases. In addition, the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) highlighted how important the Bill will be in cases of racial harassment. Only this week, the local beat officer in the centre of Christchurch—who often calls in at my office—said that she knew of two people in the constituency who were suffering a certain amount of harassment and who could be helped if the Bill were on the statute book. That is just one small part of England, so I suggest that the Government have underestimated when they state that there will be only 200 additional cases.

Stalking is a very serious matter, but it has only recently attracted media attention. It is a shame that, before anything can be deemed to be important, it has to become a media sensation. Many people still have the impression that stalking is little more than a nuisance and affects only celebrities who have in some way forfeited their right to privacy. The truth is much more complex. More than 3,000 people—young and old, men and women, those who are well known and those who are not—have been the victims of stalkers across the country in recent years. The true total figure is almost certainly higher. Stalking is not yet a crime, so the police have no criminal records on the matter.

Three months ago, there was a particularly appalling stalking case in the newspapers when a 37-year-old man—technically on a charge of causing grievous bodily harm, as that is the route that the police have often tried to use—was controversially acquitted by a court in London. The court had been told that he had harassed his victim for four years. He telephoned her up to 10 times a day, registered his car in her name and lurked outside her house—once with a machete. The man offered no defence, but the judge acquitted him because in his view there was insufficient evidence to prove intent to cause psychological harm, which was what the case turned on.

To get a criminal conviction at the moment, one must prove psychological distress equivalent to grievous bodily harm. Although this was achieved in one recent case—by Tracey Sant from Portsmouth—it has proved to be very difficult. I suspect that there was success in Portsmouth because of the assiduous work of the police there, and police officers from Portsmouth were the first to lobby me on this issue. They were incredibly frustrated at their inability to deal effectively with bad cases of stalking and harassment in the area.

Speaking last September at the Liberal Democrat annual conference in Brighton, I advocated a two-track approach to tackling the menace of stalking. This comprised a civil offence, allowing the courts to use restraining orders and award compensation, and a more serious criminal offence of molestation, where the stalker's persistent conduct causes harassment, alarm or distress, or leaves the person in fear of violence. I am pleased that the Bill broadly fits that description.

The need for legislation of this kind has been highlighted by groups including the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and the National Anti-Stalking and Harassment Campaign, both of which deserve credit for the fact that there is a Bill before us. The hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) also deserves credit for pushing the matter further, and I was disappointed that the Government stated in the summer that it would have been too complicated to amend her Stalking Bill. I believe that

if the political will had been there, a Bill could have been on the statute book by now. The Police Federation has for a long time recognised the need for a Bill of this kind.

The Bill is long overdue. We support it, but that does not mean that we should not look closely at the legislation that we pass in Parliament. I cannot emphasise that enough. In my view, the Government have taken advantage of the good will of other parties and are rushing the Bill through the House. This could have been a good example of parties working together constructively, but I believe that the Government are yet again using it in a party political way before they look at the wider public interest.

The challenge for us all has been to achieve a balance between safeguarding civil liberties and producing effective legislation to deal with stalking and harassment. By rushing this Bill through, there is a real danger that we shall not achieve that balance in the best way that we could. I hope that the Government will honestly listen to the concerns raised in what has been a truncated debate.

6.47 pm

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): There is no doubt that there is a gap in the law, and every hon. Member will be aware of complaints from constituents suffering from anti-social neighbours. I know of an individual in my constituency—I will call him Brian—who has made life intolerable for his next-door neighbour, a widow living alone and in a permanent state of terror. My concern is that the Bill is not exactly the answer to a maiden's prayer.

The widow has been advised that her neighbour cannot be prosecuted until he commits some kind of physical offence against her. That is of little comfort. The gentleman clearly has a mental problem and is well known to the psychiatric services in my constituency. He is unaware of the problems that he is creating, so this may be unconscious or passive harassment. Indeed, the lady concerned is sympathetic to his plight.

As I understand it, the Bill will provide both a criminal and a civil sanction in such cases. But what will actually happen? Will it result in the man going to prison? I am not sure that that will be the solution to his difficulties at all. While I welcome the principle of a sanction against harassment, I am concerned that it will not necessarily provide all the remedies needed by people of the kind I have described. I am not sure that the Bill will automatically be a remedy for anti-social neighbours.

My second point relates to the definition of conduct that is reasonable. Will journalists really be exempt? Was it reasonable for journalists to go to parents of victims of the Dunblane incident and persistently approach them for interviews? Under the Bill, two incidents will be sufficient to spark off a prosecution, or at least police activity, and I am concerned about precisely whose definition of "reasonable" will apply. I suggest that what journalists from the *Daily Mirror* or the other tabloids consider to be reasonable is not what other people consider to be reasonable. I ask the Minister whether there is any way to narrow the definition.

With regard to targeting, will the Bill cover a specific victim who is anxious about approaches from or stalking by an identified person, or will it apply to entire communities? What happens in, let us say, a close? No doubt right hon. and hon. Members all know of cases in which a family with social difficulties or other problems have been moved into an otherwise peaceful neighbourhood and their behaviour—passive though it may be—causes enormous offence to other people living in the vicinity. I am not convinced that a criminal sanction will be the solution in such cases, and I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister could clarify that point.

The Bill will be used very widely indeed. I do not often agree with the Liberal Democrats, but when the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) said that there was some doubt about whether there would be just 200 cases a year, I was inclined to agree. Many people will look to the Bill to meet their particular anxiety and provide a remedy for it. I suspect that that will go way beyond celebrities or vulnerable women being stalked, and it will certainly go way beyond the problem of anti-social neighbours. A large number of sharp lawyers will see considerable opportunities in the Bill. If the courts are to look to *Hansard* to discover what definitions and cases are described, it is important that the Minister should try to give clear examples of cases for which a remedy will be available under the Bill.

Having said all that, I have clear reservations and I am not convinced that a penal sanction will automatically be the solution to anti-social behaviour. Nevertheless, the widow in my constituency to whom I have referred will certainly sleep much more easily when the Bill reaches the statute book and she knows that there is at least an element of protection for her. It is to be hoped that the Bill will also have a deterrent effect—that the mere threat of an injunction, or a visit from the police threatening a legal case, will be sufficient to curtail the misconduct.

To conclude, I wish the Bill a fair wind, but I hope that the Minister will be as graphic as possible in drawing the courts' attention to the kind of cases that will be covered.

6.53 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) on having forced the Government to bring the Bill before the House. Having congratulated her on that, I have to say that this Bill is not the Bill that my hon. Friend originally introduced, nor is it the Bill that many of us thought we would support.

The Bill is widely drawn and I, for one, would have preferred to have it deal with offences of racial harassment, sexual harassment and anti-social behaviour that were specific, direct and defined, rather than have them as they are. Praise is due for their being in Bill, but the terms are extremely nebulous. The powers in the Bill will depend on, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said, organic growth in the common law. Nothing frightens me more than that, having seen how some judges interpret current law. They might narrowly construe some of the provisions in a manner that might not have been intended by Parliament.

Furthermore, like the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason), I am concerned that clever lawyers might seek to extend the scope of the Bill so that it involves matters such as trade disputes, as was hinted at by the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths), and the role of investigative journalists. What is reasonable to one judge in the pursuance of a specific case might not be reasonable in respect of journalism. We are not talking only about invasions of the privacy of distinguished

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

ex-members of the royal family or pop stars but about serious journalists carrying out serious research. The defence that is allowed depends on the subjective judgment of the individual judge who is directing the jury in a specific case. That causes me great concern.

I turn now to the Bill, specifically clause 4, and to why the Bill was originally introduced. I shall refer to a case in my constituency which was known as the "Orchard Park seige". Briefly, the facts of the case are as follows. A woman in my constituency had an affair that she brought to an end. Not satisfied with that, the man involved criminally assaulted her, bound her and left her in a ditch, for which he was sent to prison. He served a short time, got parole and was released; he then started to pester the woman. She complained to the police, who, she believes, did nothing about it, even though the man was out on licence and he was alleged to have boasted in a local pub about what he intended to do to the woman. She also believes that the police knew that he had what turned out to be an imitation firearm. Some of these matters are the subject of a Police Complaints Authority inquiry, but this is what the woman feels happened.

Eventually, the woman was seized outside her home and bundled into it. Her daughter arrived some time later and was also seized. The man appeared to fire his gun. He viciously assaulted the woman, broke her sternum and raped her about a dozen times. After 14 days, the police successfully ended the seige. I have nothing but praise for the way in which the police handled a difficult situation. They believed that the man was armed and they knew that he had hostages whom he might kill.

The jury in the subsequent trial acquitted the man of rape. It is hard to imagine how the woman could have acquiesced in sexual intercourse in her physical condition at that time, having, as she did, a broken breastbone. The police in that case regarded the jury's verdict as perverse.

One of the problems in the case was the fact that some of the rapes took place when the daughter was in the room although she was told to turn her face away. She was petrified about giving evidence; nothing that the police could say would persuade her to change her mind. Throughout the period after the arrest, a policewoman lived with mother and daughter, looking after them, giving them every encouragement. Nevertheless, the daughter refused to give evidence. I believe that to be one reason why the man was acquitted of rape. He was given about 10 years for criminal assault. Had the Bill been law at that time, the police might have been able to halt that tragic series of events. I say only "might", because many aspects of that case remain to be examined.

What priority will the police give to cases of harassment? What judgment will they exercise? Where will harassment appear in their hierarchy of offences—above or below burglary, above or below actual physical assault? What is their subjective judgment of the complaint made to them? The subjectivity will create a variety of problems.

Another type of harassment arose in that case. The woman gave evidence for two days, separated by a screen from the accused, but in the public gallery were all the members of the accused's family, looking down at her with hatred in their eyes. What sort of intimidation was that? It is an interesting question. If it went on for several days, would it amount to intimidation—harassment—under the Act, even if it took place in a court of law, where people were entitled to be? The woman certainly felt that their presence, looking at her in that way, hampered her in giving evidence, and her daughter felt that their presence intimidated her and prevented her from giving evidence.

Although the Crown Prosecution Service brought several charges of rape against the man, it did not bring them all; despite the perverse verdict, the CPS decided not to bring up the other cases. That woman had a horrific experience as a result of stalking and continued to feel deep resentment that she had been so abused, yet the man who did all that to her was not convicted of the violation of her womanhood, as he should have been.

Questions arise about matters that are not within the ambit of the Bill but arise from it. What should be the role of the social services in such a case? The woman was living in a council house. When the man was released on licence, she visited the local housing authority and asked to be transferred. She gave the reasons but did not go into all the details. Her request was therefore refused.

By chance, however, the man had been allocated a flat that directly overlooked the house in which the woman lived. She was conscious of him always being there, overlooking where she lived, and she was conscious of his actions. The local housing authority felt that it could not move him, because it was unaware of his record, and it did not feel that the woman had sufficient grounds to be moved, because, rightly or wrongly, she felt that she could not give all the details of what had happened to her. There is a need, therefore, for housing associations, local authorities and the social services to take into account the effects of harassment on people in vulnerable situations, especially women.

My constituent asked me to make those points in the debate because of her concern, not only about what had happened to her but about what might happen to other women in other circumstances. I welcome the Bill in so far as it fulfils the purpose of the Stalking Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen, but not in so far as it poses enormously extended threats to civil liberties as a result of what the Government have done with it.

We welcome the aspects of the Bill designed to try to overcome a serious and grievous matter affecting many women in this country—and also, strangely enough, men. As the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) said, stalking is a frequent problem. I hope that the knowledge that the Bill exists and that the powers exist under the Bill will encourage women to complain to the police. Let us hope that the police devote sufficient priority to the matter to take action on such cases, because failure to do so affects the well-being not only of the woman but of her family, her extended family and the whole community.

7.6 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Legislation that is rushed through the House tends to be bad legislation. On this occasion, there was no need for a rush, but we have a Home Secretary who always seeks party advantage in preference to good government.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) introduced her Stalking Bill, the Government would have had no difficulty in ensuring that it became a good Bill and passed through the House; but no—the Government preferred to block it and claim that they were doing something different.

That is the Bill's tragedy. By the time my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen had introduced her Bill, it was obvious that stalking had become a problem and needed to be tackled. When a private Member introduces a Bill, it receives a Second Reading and goes into Committee. Then discussions take place between the promoter and the Government. Almost every clause of the original Bill is dropped, a series of new clauses appears and the Bill emerges from Committee, improved yet managing to fulfil the promoter's original intention.

If such proper scrutiny had taken place, we would now have a useful measure on the statute book. Sadly, the Home Secretary did not want the chance of a Labour Member being responsible for passing legislation on stalking; he wanted to claim the credit. He produced a discussion document. There was a lengthy charade about whether the Government would promote legislation. Finally, we got the Bill. We have 10 days in which to examine it.

I do not complain that hon. Members have only 10 days in which to examine the Bill, but I do complain that people outside this place have little time in which to do so. It is surprising how difficult it is to get hold of a Bill like this, to study it, to work out whether it will meet one's circumstances and to lobby Members of Parliament to ensure that it does the task.

Holding Report stage immediately after Committee stage does not provide enough time—not because, in Committee, Members often do a great deal to improve the Bill, but because often the amendments that they table force Ministers into a discussion with civil servants and draftspersons, to make the Bill that crucial bit better. I suspect that, if we rush this legislation through, we shall not produce a good Bill.

I am disappointed that the Home Secretary's approach is to produce a vague Bill, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen said, will be filled out as a result of case law. But we are told that there is a problem now, and we want to provide some certainty for people who are distressed and upset about being stalked. They should be relieved now, without having to take their case all the way to the Appeal Court. My hon. Friend attempted to make the original Bill clear so that anybody could understand it.

If a police officer trying to advise somebody picks up this Bill, he cannot say that certain behaviour is all right, because it will have to be tested in the courts. This is not a particularly good document for the police to use; it is certainly not a good document for a lawyer to use when advising somebody. Lawyers always say "on the one hand" and "on the other hand". We want clarity and we do not get it from this Bill.

My next complaint is that the problem will not be solved simply by changing the law; we need more resources. The Government claim that very few cases will be involved. If that is so, the legislation will not meet the needs that exist out there in the country. If there are more cases than the Government say, from where will the resources come? Either the police will not use the legislation, in which case there is no point in us passing it, or they will have to take resources from somewhere else. If the legislation is to work, we need more resources.

I wish to ask the Home Secretary about the exemption if someone is behaving reasonably. Many people are involved in harassing other people and do it perfectly legitimately. The Leader of the Opposition tries to harass the Prime Minister, and I am sure that no one would complain about that. Most Members of Parliament try to harass Ministers, and it is our job to do so. Most hon. Members will admit to harassing a fair number of civil servants and officials in their constituencies to get justice for their constituents.

The housing officers in Thameside and Stockport must sometimes feel, when I ring them up and bend their ears, that I am harassing and pressing them. I think that that is perfectly legitimate and that I could defend my behaviour. Most people would say that it is reasonable for a Member of Parliament to act in that way on behalf of his or her constituents to put right an injustice.

What about a constituent who tries to put right an injustice for himself? Does he has the same defence? This seems to be one of the problems. If someone can say that he is a debt collector and operating as such, his behaviour will be acceptable when he harasses people to pay their debts. But what happens if an individual tries to get people to settle their debts?

Recently, a constituent had some work done by a local builder whose standard of work was appalling. He went to the small claims court and was awarded money, but then the builder said that he was not Joe Bloggs the builder but John Jones the builder. Everyone knows the trick: builders move easily from one business to the next, leaving their debts behind them. My constituent followed that individual around for a week and every person that the builder talked to was handed a note by my constituent explaining his claim for money. Eventually, he got his money. I think that that was harassment, but justified harassment. I am concerned that my constituent, acting as an individual to try to get that money, could not claim that he was a professional debt collector.

What about the Child Support Agency? That government body has the right to sue people for money, but what about an individual who feels that the CSA is not doing enough and wants to provide extra evidence to it? Would that be legitimate?

What about journalists? Moreover, when is a journalist a journalist, and when is he not? If he or she has full-time paid employment, there will be little doubt, but if he or she is freelance there are difficulties. A particular problem for a journalist is that, with hindsight, all sorts of things can be seen to be unreasonable but at the time it may have seemed to the journalist that they were reasonable.

What about writers? We often read articles in newspapers saying that a certain biography was authorised and they usually say what a nice person the subject was, but how legitimately can someone trying to produce an unauthorised biography go about collecting information under this legislation, and when does it become harassment?

I could give many more examples, but the Government must deal with the question of the defence of someone pursuing a legitimate occupation.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that he would be on to a better point if he explained that,

[Sir Ivan Lawrence]

as the word "reasonable" is understood in different ways by different people in different circumstances, the real criticism of this part of the Bill is that it will provide endless work for lawyers, at considerable public cost?

Mr. Bennett: I fully accept that point. As I said at the beginning, it is important to be clear so that people know what they are entitled to do. They should not have to wait until lawyers have made a lot of money out of this matter and until there have been 20 cases over five or six years to establish what the law is.

It was claimed that the Bill would cover harassment by groups. I am not sure how that will work, and I hope that the Minister will explain. The last two cases of racial harassment with which I dealt involved not just one individual but a group of people—five or six—living in the same street who all behaved in a racist way towards someone attempting to move into that street. I should have thought that one or two of the people involved might be involved in two or more incidents, but I suspect that encouragement of collective action was the problem.

More recently, I tried to persuade one of my constituents to give evidence in a particularly nasty case. The intimidation that he suffered as a witness was carried out not by one individual but by a group of people who all believed that they liked the accused person and wanted to make things as difficult as possible for anybody acting as a witness.

I want a clear statement from the Home Secretary that the Bill will not be used against protesters. This country has always believed in freedom of speech and freedom to demonstrate. There seems to be a narrow line between protesting and demonstrating, and harassment. I hope that the Minister will make that clear.

I wish to tell the House about two incidents in my constituency where I believe that what is needed are resources rather than legislation. Not long ago, a reasonable couple came to see me at my advice bureau in Reddish and said what terrible neighbours they had. There had been a dispute about a boundary fence and their neighbour had acted utterly unreasonably and outrageously. I must admit that I believed that, from what was described to me, the neighbour had behaved outrageously. I went on to my second advice bureau, which I do in the evening, at Denton, where another reasonable couple came to see me and said that their neighbours were utterly unreasonable and had behaved outrageously. The two couples lived next door to each other and were describing each other. Had I heard only one story, I would have been convinced that someone should take action on that couple's behalf against the neighbours.

The problem with those situations is that there is a good chance that the police or lawyers will hear only one side of the story. The only advice I could give to the couples once I knew the situation was that they should move, but of course both couples thought that the other couple should move. It will be difficult to resolve the issue satisfactorily, although the four people are all reasonable except when involved in that neighbours' dispute. If we had the resources for a conciliation service, it could bring the four together and explain to them all that they are harassing their neighbours and that, if they cannot come to some accommodation, the only solution is for one pair to move.

The final example I wish to mention is that of a young lady who came to see me with a worrying case. She described how she was being followed and said that there were people spying on her. I assumed, as she talked, that she was suffering from paranoia and that she did not have a case, but I agreed to take it up with the police and social security. I wrote to both services asking them to confirm that they were not carrying out surveillance and, much to my surprise, someone from the social security fraud squad rang me up and said, "Look, I should not really tell you this, but we have made a terrible mistake in this case. We have been carrying out surveillance because we thought she was claiming benefit while she was working, but we now know the whole history of the case. The police were making inquiries because they thought that she was involved in illegal activities." In that case, because I found out the full story, I was able to tell my constituent that there had been a mistake, people had been following her for what they thought were legitimate reasons and it would all stop.

The problem with the legislation is that various people are exempt, but how will individuals be told that whoever is following them is exempt? That will be difficult, because people might have legitimate worries that they are being harassed and the only way to tell them that that is not happening would be to say that a government agency had been carrying out surveillance on them and causing them upset unnecessarily. The Government must consider how information will be passed on in those circumstances to reassure people that what they believe to be harassment is not harassment, but the Government legitimately checking up on them. In most cases, either the surveillance will result in a prosecution because the person was committing some offence or that person can be assured that it has stopped.

It is unfortunate that the measure is being rushed through the House. We should have had much more time for scrutiny. I hope that we can pursue some of the amendments and that, as has happened so often when legislation has been rushed through the House, the real scrutiny will take place in the House of Lords. I hope that the Lords will show more vigour than is likely to be shown in the Commons.

7.22 pm

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): I wish to start by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), the Home Secretary and everyone who has contributed to the debate for their gracious comments about my attempts earlier this year to try to do something about the important issue of stalking. I also wish to place on record the fact that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn made clear, we support the Bill and are anxious to see it on the statute book as quickly as possible.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths), who is not in his place, referred to men being stalked. He is right; and I have corresponded with a number of men who have been stalked. The problem is predominantly faced by women, but I notice that, in *The Independent* the other day, there was a letter from a woman who was being stalked by another woman. Clearly the crime is no respecter of gender.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) spoke about the extent of agreement on the Bill, and I endorse his comments. It is welcome when we

are able to co-operate across the Floor of the House, and I am sure that the public would welcome it if we did it a bit more often. My hon. Friend is well known for his long interest in the private security industry. He has continued to press for regulation of that industry, as recommended by the Home Affairs Select Committee, which is chaired by the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence). We hope that, one day, the Government will introduce such regulation.

The hon. and learned Member for Burton gave me much encouragement in my efforts, and I am grateful. I learned much from him when I was a member of the Select Committee that he chairs so expertly, but he referred disingenuously to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn as causing mischief. I can assure him that that was not the intention of my hon. Friend. There is still some concern that the Bill will cause problems for journalists. I have a copy of a letter from the Guild of Editors, which states:

"The Guild remains concerned at the ease with which the Bill's provisions could be used to curb the media rather than protect the victims of stalking."

May I say to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock)—who has temporarily left her place—how much I welcome her party's support for action to tackle stalking, which seemed to appear at its recent annual conference. The hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) mentioned the problem of neighbours. He might like to read the proposals of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn in our "Quiet Life" document, which would tackle the neighbour problems of which he spoke.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) spoke, rightly, of the need for greater detail and stricter definition. None of us could have failed to be moved by his horrific tale about the case in his constituency. Like him, I hope that women will be encouraged to go to the police and to complain as a result of this and, I hope, future legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) spoke about private Members' Bills and how they have sometimes managed to reach the statute book with the right spirit of cross-party co-operation. I could not agree more with what he said.

It is unusual, but welcome, that, in a Chamber so dominated by men, we should debate an issue of serious concern to women. The Police Federation estimates that 3,000 people fall victim to stalkers every year and that the overwhelming majority of them are women. As with domestic violence—also largely a crime committed by men against women—there has perhaps been a reluctance for too long to address the menace of stalking.

I am sure that those witnessing the debate today, especially the victims of stalkers, wonder why it has taken so long to get round to doing anything about a problem that causes such misery to thousands of women. Women have seen their relationships torn apart and their children taken into care because they have suffered such enormous psychological damage that they can no longer cope. Women have been made afraid to venture out alone and too frightened to pick up the telephone. Women's lives have been left in tatters by the torment they have suffered at the hands of stalkers.

Each year, the women on the Opposition Benches try to mark International Women's Day by highlighting issues of concern to women. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) secured a slot for a ten-minute Bill in March. In a spirit that I suspect is more common among Labour Members than Conservative, she asked me to use it to introduce a Bill to combat stalking. That Bill, as we know, was blocked by the Government on 10 May. I recently asked the Home Secretary why the Government felt that any differences between us about the contents of my Bill could not have been resolved in Committee. He replied that

"there was no time and there would not have been full and proper consultation."—[*Official Report*, 28 October 1996; Vol. 284, c. 336.]

However, it has taken the Government a full nine months to come forward with their proposals.

If a week is a long time in politics, nine months must have seemed like an eternity for the victims of stalkers. As for consultation, the Home Secretary and his colleagues know that we consulted widely on my Bill before it was published. We took advice from the police, from lawyers who had been involved in stalking cases, from the Home Secretary's officials at the Home Office—at the express invitation of the Minister of State—from the Lord Chancellor, from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust and from the national anti-stalking and harassment campaign. Most important, we consulted the victims of stalkers. We even consulted Conservative Members, and I have their replies in front of me. The hon. and learned Member for Burton made a number of suggestions that we were careful to include in the final draft.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) wrote to me on 2 May, commenting on the draft Bill that I had sent her. She said:

"Dear Janet, Thank you for your note re: Stalking. It looks fine to me!"

In his letter to me of 4 May, the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) said :

"Thank you for sending me a copy of your draft Bill on stalking. I think this is a very good effort and provides a very good basis for discussion with the Minister at the Home Office."

What did the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), say about the Bill, for he too was sent a draft of it on 22 April, two weeks before it was published? He declined to comment until the eve of the Second Reading—no doubt he was consulting. He said that he regretted that the scope of my Bill was "too wide". He continued:

"It could mean that innocent people going about their lawful business would find themselves branded as criminals."

He also said:

"I do not think there is a political difference between us."

Is he not aware that it is widely believed that a political difference prevented the Government from working with us nine months ago to provide relief for the victims of stalking?

It is also widely believed that the Home Secretary could not stomach the idea of backing a Labour Bill. The hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates), the duty Government Whip, was moved to shout, "Object," on 10 May to block our Stalking Bill. He has now received his reward and stepped neatly into the ministerial shoes of the dissembling hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts).

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): That is not worthy of the hon. Lady.

Ms Anderson: If the hon. Gentleman listens, he might learn something. The hon. Member for Havant truly learned the lesson: "Never put in writing what you would not wish to see reprinted on the front page of *The Sun*."

[Ms Anderson]

We cannot know how many victims could have been helped sooner. In the absence of a specific anti-stalking law, it has been difficult for victims to seek redress other than through charges such as grievous bodily harm. That has inevitably taken up hours of the courts' time while lawyers argued that the charge covered psychological harm. It worked in the case of Peri Southall, who was stalked by Clarence Morris; he was found guilty. It worked also for Tracy Sant, who had endured three years of mental torture during a campaign of harassment and intimidation by Anthony Burstow, but it took five days of tortuous legal wrangling to get a conviction.

It did not work for Margaret Bent, who was allegedly stalked by Dennis Chambers during an unrelenting four-year campaign that began simply after he saw her in the street. Dennis Chambers, who offered no defence to the charge of causing Miss Bent grievous bodily harm, walked free and Margaret Bent faced the added ordeal of being cross-examined by Chambers, who chose to defend himself. It is no wonder that Margaret's mother was moved to say:

"I hope the judge and the jury some day experience what I have experienced with my daughter. He made her life a hell for four years, not only hers but everyone in her family and her friends".

Margaret Bent is one woman who might have been sleeping easier in her bed tonight if something had been done sooner to help the victims of stalking. However, the stalking menace was ideal for the kind of action that the Home Secretary likes to unveil at Conservative party conferences—and that is what he did.

Mr. Maclean: This is unnecessary and stupid.

Ms Anderson: If the Minister will be more patient, he will understand my reasons for repeating the Home Secretary's words. At the party conference, the right hon. and learned Gentleman said:

"There is one group of offenders from whom the public needs special protection. Stalkers. They can make a woman's life a misery . . . Terrified prisoners of someone else's obsession. We need quick and effective remedies for the less serious cases. And tough sanctions for the most serious. And today I can announce that we shall have them. Women deserve that protection . . . And I will make sure they get it."

The explanatory note for editors, appended to the Home Secretary's speech, clearly stated:

"The Government proposes to deal with the menace of stalking through a combination of civil and criminal remedies".

We could have been forgiven for believing that the much-trumpeted commitment would be included in the Queen's Speech—that the Government might keep their promise and bring forward their own legislation—but no, the measure was consigned to a private Member's Bill.

How strange it is that what could not be achieved by a private Member's Bill many months before would now be tackled in precisely that manner. Only when my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition showed his readiness to put party politics aside, was the Prime Minister forced to concede that the Government would introduce their own legislation. I suspect that that was as much a surprise for the Home Secretary as it was for us.

At last we have the Bill before us today. In May, the Home Secretary said:

"the Government had been preparing its own legislation to counter the menace of stalking for some time".

He described my Bill as, "rushed, botched and unworkable" but, in the end, he has brought forward a Bill that is remarkably similar. In May, the Home Secretary said:

"as soon as we are satisfied that we have a workable definition of the crime, we will legislate".

Surprisingly, he has now introduced a Bill with practically no definition at all. Seemingly any activity that a court "reasonably" decides is harassment is just that, and if a court thinks that certain activities were causing fear of violence, they were. Ministers claimed that our definition was unworkable, but theirs is virtually non-existent.

There can be no clearer example of the Opposition leading where the Government have failed to act. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition famously said, he leads his party—in contrast to the Prime Minister, who follows his. On guns, knives, paedophiles, criminally anti-social neighbours and stalking, Labour has led the way. I am sure that the lesson is not lost on a country that looks increasingly to the Opposition for constructive law and order solutions.

7.36 pm

Mr. Howard: With the leave of the House, I should like to reply to the debate.

We have just heard a ludicrous speech that was unworthy of the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson). She claimed credit a moment ago for the Leader of the Opposition, who she said had put party politics aside in his speech on the Loyal Address. That accusation could never be levelled at the hon. Lady in light of her contribution.

The truth about the matter that we are debating this evening is that stalking is a serious menace from which countless women, in particular, suffer greatly. Nothing could do more harm to those women than to cobble together an unprepared Bill, rush it on to the statute book, and pretend that it offered them relief. Earlier today, I paid tribute to the hon. Lady and congratulated her on raising the matter last year in her private Member's Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Sir M. Shersby) said in his letter—which the hon. Lady quoted in her speech—the Bill provided a useful basis for discussion with Ministers.

We discussed the issue with her, but her Bill would not have provided an adequate statutory remedy to the mischief with which we all want to deal. It was deficient in a number of respects, which I identified with some precision earlier this afternoon. It does no one any justice to gather an absolute farrago of inaccuracies in an attempt to demonstrate that the Government's reaction to the hon. Lady's Bill last year was based on a desire—the hon. Lady made this specific accusation—not to support an Opposition private Member's Bill. What utter nonsense.

Ms Janet Anderson: It is not.

Mr. Howard: Let me give the hon. Lady an example from this Session. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray) introduced a private Member's Bill on knives. He and the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) said, "We should like to introduce a Bill on knives, and this is the Bill we want." They showed us the Bill and we said,

"We don't think much of your Bill, because we don't think it would work. We are keen to help you if you want to put a sensible measure to deal with knives on the statute book, and we will provide you with a Bill." That is exactly what we did.

With the Government's full support, the hon. Gentleman, who came first in the private Members' ballot—a Labour Member—introduced a Bill on knives, which was drafted and proposed by the Government. We do not have the slightest difficulty supporting a Bill proposed by a Labour Member. To suggest the contrary is completely untrue from start to finish. The hon. Lady should know that, and she should know better than to make disgraceful accusations, as she did during her appalling speech.

The hon. Lady is giggling away on the Front Bench. She had the temerity to claim that she had consulted the National Anti-stalking and Harassment Campaign. I have the specific authority of its director to say that she rejects very strongly the idea that the hon. Lady consulted that body about her stalking proposals. That was simply not the case, and that fact should be placed on the record.

I remind the hon. Lady exactly why her Bill was defective. In the first place, it would not have provided a defence for people who are engaged in legitimate activities, such as journalists and others who have been mentioned by Opposition Members, including the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George). In that respect, it was too wide. We had to give the matter a great deal of thought, and to consult carefully before we were able to propose a solution to that problem.

In another respect, the hon. Lady's Bill was too narrow, because it proceeded by way of a list of examples of conduct that would constitute stalking. The trouble with such a list is that, although the Bill may say—as hers did—that the list is without prejudice to the generality of the scope of the clause, such matters are subject to principles of statutory construction and interpretation.

One of those principles—if the hon. Lady is interested—is called the ejusdem generis rule, which requires such a list to be construed as though it could be extended to cover things of the same nature as those in the list. As the list in the hon. Lady's Bill concentrated entirely on activities characteristic of classic stalking, it would not have covered activities that constitute racial harassment or that come under the heading of harassment of one neighbour by another. That is the truth of the matter.

Ms Anderson: That was never intended.

Mr. Howard: In that case, the world at large will welcome the fact that our Bill does intend to cover such activities.

Ms Anderson: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: No, not until I have finished making this point.

Many people will welcome the fact that our Bill gives protection to victims of racial harassment and to the victims of the activities of noisy neighbours. They will not have counted it an advantage of the hon. Lady's Bill that it excluded such activities.

Ms Anderson: May I reaffirm what the right hon. and learned Gentleman clearly understands? I want to put on record the fact that my Bill was never intended to deal with the problems of criminally anti-social neighbours and racial harassment. As I am sure he knows, the Opposition have for some time had proposals on those matters. We are pleased that the Government have at last addressed those problems and have copied many of our proposals.

Mr. Howard: Let me explain the deficiencies of the hon. Lady's approach in words that are more pointed and eloquent than any I could devise. At the Suzy Lamplugh Trust conference in October, a victim of a stalker told my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, "If you have a list of activities which you ban, my stalker will simply sit down and work out another activity with which to torment me." That was the deficiency of the hon. Lady's Bill, and the present Bill seeks to remedy that.

Ms Anderson *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I believe that the Bill does remedy that deficiency, which is why it was worth waiting—

Ms Anderson *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I shall give way in a moment.

It was worth waiting a few months—not many months—to prepare proper and effective legislation, which I believe we have achieved with our Bill.

Ms Anderson: I refer the Home Secretary to the definition in my Bill. Indeed it had a list—it drew on the experience of other countries that have anti-stalking laws—but it was not exhaustive. We were careful to include a catch-all phrase, which was presumably why he said at the time that the Bill was drawn too widely. It referred to a person who

"does any other act or acts in connection with another person so as to be reasonably likely to cause that other person to feel harassed, alarmed, distressed"

and so on.

I emphasise the fact that the list was not exhaustive. Perhaps the victim who spoke to the Minister of State at the conference did not understand that.

Mr. Howard: I fear that it is the hon. Lady who does not understand. I shall explain it to her yet again. We said that her Bill was too wide—not because of the clause to which she has just referred, but because it did not provide a defence to people engaged in legitimate activities. I have already said that twice, and this is the third time. I shall say it a fourth time if necessary, but that is the truth of the matter.

The clause to which the hon. Lady referred would not have provided a solution to the problem that I identified earlier. Lists are construed according to the nature of the activities that are put in them. That is the deficiency of the list approach, which is why we said, correctly, that the hon. Lady's Bill was too narrow in that respect.

Mr. McNamara: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is jumping from place to place. He referred to the ejusdem generis rule in relation to racial harassment. My hon. Friend's Bill stated specifically that all other matters that reflect stalking would be included. The ejusdem generis rule would have covered that.

Mr. Howard: It would not have covered that, because the ejusdem generis rule means that the list is interpreted

[Mr. Howard]

and constructed in accordance with the nature of the activities that are identified. It is the hon. Gentleman who is rushing about all over the place. He is trying to contend that his hon. Friend's Bill would have covered racial harassment. The hon. Lady herself has just argued that she never intended that her Bill should cover racial harassment. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways.

Mr. McNamara: I did not say that. I specifically said to the right hon. and learned Gentleman that he was jumping the ground by saying that my hon. Friend's Bill was not covered by the rule because it included racial harassment. We said specifically that it did not include racial harassment, so the rule applied.

Mr. Howard: That is precisely why the Bill was too narrow. I do not know why the hon. Gentleman is getting so excited about that. It was too narrow because it did not cover those other activities from which people suffer a great deal of harm, which give rise to a great deal of mischief and for which Parliament should provide a remedy. That is why our Bill deals with those aspects of the mischief, and specifically provides remedies for those problems.

Mr. George Howarth *rose—*

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman wants to intervene to help his hon. Friend.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend needs no help at all. Indeed, given that she was making, as it were, her maiden speech from the Dispatch Box, I think that she has done very well. Certainly she does not need my help; my purpose is to help the Home Secretary.

Will the Home Secretary make it clear once and for all whether he thinks that the scope of my hon. Friend's Bill was too wide, or whether he thinks that it was too narrow? He has made both allegations in the space of two minutes. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members do not like to hear this, but the Home Secretary said that my hon. Friend's Bill was defective in that it would not allow people going about their legitimate business to do so. What does he think was the purpose of clause 4 of that Bill? The clause stated:

"No person acting under statutory or other lawful authority insofar as he acts within that authority shall be guilty of an offence under this Act."

Does that not constitute an exception and a defence? Precisely the problem that the Home Secretary said existed in my hon. Friend's Bill was covered in it.

Mr. Howard: I will explain—for, I think, the fifth time. The hon. Lady's Bill was too wide in one respect, and too narrow in another. It was too narrow because of the list, as I have just said, and it was too wide because it did not provide a defence for those who were engaged in legitimate activities but not under any statutory authority. A journalist who may be pursuing an investigation is certainly not acting under any such authority. This Bill, however, deals specifically with the matter by setting a standard: whether it is reasonable for someone to act in such a way in the circumstances. That is entirely different from the misconceived approach adopted in the hon. Lady's Bill, which would not have worked. *[Interruption.]* The approach to which the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) keeps referring would not have achieved that objective, for reasons that I have explained very clearly.

I owe the hon. Lady an apology: I had not appreciated that this was her maiden speech from the Front Bench. I welcome her to the Front Bench, and trust that the other speeches that she will make from it in due course will be a substantial improvement on her effort tonight.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I fear that my right hon. and learned Friend is, characteristically, being too kind to the hon. Lady. Did her Bill not contain two serious deficiencies that he has not mentioned? It would have made the same penalty available for both stalking causing harassment and the other offence of stalking causing fear for safety, which would obviously not have been very sensible. Moreover, the hon. Lady's Bill was intended to reverse the burden of proof: the defence would have had to prove that the defendant did not know that his actions would have the alleged effect. That would have delayed the Bill considerably, because if anything causes controversy in this place, it is the reversal of the burden of proof.

Mr. Howard: My hon. and learned Friend is right, but it would take me a long time to list all the many imperfections in the hon. Lady's Bill. I was concentrating on the main structural weaknesses—the weaknesses of principle—and trying to explain why we needed to take some time to consider these matters carefully and to consult widely. That is the basis on which we have been able to present proposals that will not disappoint the many women who suffer as a result of the activities that the legislation is designed to remedy. Our proposals will not dash their hopes, or give rise to false hopes by enacting legislation that would be imperfect and would not work; they will lead to the enactment of effective legislation that will give those women—and not only women, as we have heard—the remedy to which they are entitled.

On that basis, I commend the Bill to the House. I believe that it will significantly help victims of the kind of activity that gives concern to hon. Members in all parties.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Coe.*]

Bill immediately considered in Committee.

[DAME JANET FOOKES *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

PROHIBITION OF HARASSMENT

7.55 pm

Mr. Bennett: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 8, leave out "or ought to know".

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Janet Fookes): With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 22, in page 1, line 10, leave out subsection (2).

No. 12, in page 1, line 13, at end insert—

'(2A) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection 2 above, a person pursues a course of conduct amounting to harassment if he:

(a) follows, loiters near, watches or approaches another person;

(b) telephones (which for the avoidance of doubt shall include telephoning a person but remaining silent during the call), contacts by other electronic means, or otherwise contacts another person;

(c) loiters near, watches, approaches or enters a place where another person lives works or repeatedly visits;

(d) interferes with property which does not belong to him and is in the possession of another person;

(e) leaves offensive, unwarranted or unsolicited material at a place where another person lives, works or regularly visits; or

(f) gives offensive, unwarranted or unsolicited material to another person

so as to be reasonably likely to cause that other person to feel harassed, alarmed, distressed or to fear for his safety or for that of one or more third persons to whom he has a duty of protection or with whom he is associated.'.

No. 5, in clause 4, clause 4, page 2, line 27, leave out 'or ought to know'.

No. 23, in clause 4, page 2, line 29, leave out subsection (2).

No. 18, in clause 4, page 2, line 33, at end insert—

'(2A) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (2) above, a person pursues a course of conduct for the purposes of this section when he persistently behaves in any of the ways mentioned in section 1 (2) or (2A) above'.

No. 9, in clause 7, clause 7, page 3, leave out lines 39 and 40.

No. 10, in clause 7, page 3, line 41, leave out 'two' and insert 'three'.

Mr. Bennett: This brings us straight back to one of the central issues that featured on Second Reading—the question whether the Government's approach is the best, or whether something clearer and more specific is needed.

Clause 1(1)(b) states that a person must not pursue a course of conduct "which he knows" amounts to harassment. There is clearly no problem with that except when someone wishes to prosecute, when it will be extremely difficult to prove intent. The Government therefore added the catch-all "or ought to know"—which poses the difficult question of what someone "ought to know". That is made conditional on subsection (2), which deals with the word "harassment", and on subsection (3), which deals with the question of reversing proof and proving that what was done was reasonable. That was the basis of the castigation that we heard from the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence).

I do not think that the Government's approach is the best. I think that it would be far better for us to try to provide certainty in legislation, rather than leaving it to be provided in case law resulting from a series of cases based on what constitutes harassment, what is reasonable and what someone ought to know.

Obviously, there are alternative approaches. Amendment No. 12 puts back the list that was in the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson). If the Government really want to deal with the problem, they should consider a compromise between their approach and that of my hon. Friend, making it easy for a person to understand that, if he pursues a certain course of conduct, he can be accused of harassment, that he will have committed an offence and that he can be punished for it.

The Home Secretary has argued that, if a list is included, the court must take notice of it, and will take less notice of any catch-all at the end of the list. If he really feels that he cannot put such a list in the Bill, he should look to the various devices that Parliament comes up with—codes of practice, regulations and guidance—so that, if he insists on a catch-all phrase, there is a simple way for a police officer to explain to someone that, if he continues to behave in such a way, he will be involved in harassment, and a lawyer giving advice will have a document allowing him to say, "This looks as though it would fall foul of the law."

Therefore, in practice, the Government have not really solved the problems by going for a wide definition using the phrases "ought to know", "harassment" and "reasonable". That will be a marvellous area for lawyers to work over for many years. Instead of solving the problems of someone being stalked, it may mean that persons face much more upset and worry because their court case will become long running.

I therefore hope that, in responding to this group of amendments, the Government will recognise that there is a problem with the clause and will clarify it.

8 pm

Mr. Maclean: Amendment No. 1 would fundamentally damage the Bill's effectiveness. The great difficulty in using existing law to prevent harassing conduct is that the stalker will not always intend to cause harassment. That is why we ensured in clause 1 that a person is prohibited from pursuing a course of conduct, not only where he knows that it causes harassment, but where he ought to know that harassment would be caused. A person ought to know that that course of conduct would amount to harassment in circumstances where a reasonable person, in possession of the same information, would think that the course of conduct amounted to harassment of the other person.

The amendment serves to ensure merely that the offence of causing harassment will apply only where intent could be proved. That would go no further than existing laws, which both victims' organisations and the police agree are inadequate to deal with stalkers who claim that they do not intend to cause harassment to their victim. Victims of stalking need protection against such stalkers. Clause 1 provides it. We cannot accept any amendment that weakens that position.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) commented that the Home Secretary had said that the list system would mean that the courts would take less notice of the catch-all at the end of the list. That is not exactly the correct interpretation. It is not that the courts would take less notice of the so-called catch-all at the end of the list, but that, under the courts' rules of construction and interpretation, they would interpret that catch-all as being in the same generic list as the actual list. It would cease, therefore, to be a general catch-all and be regarded as a narrowly defined catch-all of exactly the activities specified in the list.

[Mr. Maclean]

I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's amendment, which would fundamentally weaken the Bill, and I hope that he will see fit to withdraw it.

Mr. Bennett: On a point of order, Dame Janet. From the list that I have, I thought that a whole series of other amendments were grouped with amendment No. 1. Is that correct?

The Second Deputy Chairman: Yes it is. Indeed the hon. Gentleman will recall that, when I first called amendment No. 1 out, I mentioned that it was grouped with others. It is not a matter for the occupant of the Chair to decide how much a Member or a Minister shall say about the other amendments in the group.

Mr. Bennett: Further to that point of order, Dame Janet. The point was that I had thought that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench might have wanted to speak to their amendments that are grouped with amendment No. 1. I was not sure that they were aware that they were.

Ms Janet Anderson: We do not intend to press this to a vote, but we would like to explore the thinking behind the Bill's definition and how the Government think that it might work in practice.

Given some of the comments by Conservative Members about our amendments, may I specifically refer them to a letter from the Association of County Councils, which says that its

"worry about the Bill as drafted is that it is drawn in very wide terms. For example, 'harassment' is not specifically defined, and it appears that the Bill covers harassment whether in the home, the workplace, on the streets, etc. I am not saying that this is wrong, merely that it does not seem clear."

I have already mentioned that the Guild of British Newspaper Editors is concerned about the effect on the media.

May I also reiterate the views of the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, which, as we all know, has long taken an interest in this issue. A letter from Anne Strahan, the trust's projects and research manager, apologises to me for her comments to the *Daily Mail*.

Mr. Maclean: We have had this before.

Ms Anderson: Yes, but, believe me, it is worth repeating, if the Minister will just be patient.

The letter states:

"At the time of speaking to the Daily Mail yesterday, I misunderstood the intention of the amendments within the Bill, assuming these amendments to override the more general nature of the Bill. As an extra provision to the Bill, these amendments would in fact strengthen rather than weaken the Bill.

The Trust is very pleased that Labour are still working to improve the Bill".

I hope therefore that Minister will understand that that is the spirit in which I have tabled the amendments.

The amendments seek to add to the definitions laid out for the lower offence of harassment and the higher offence of causing fear of violence. I know that the Home Secretary recognises the need to get the definition right when legislating to combat the menace of stalking. On 10 May, in an interview on "The World at One", he said:

"Stalking is a particularly difficult thing to define, which is why we are taking some care to make sure that we get it right. As soon as we have a workable definition of the crime we will legislate";

so, as I say, we would like to explore with the Minister whether the Bill's definition is workable, which, presumably, he considers it to be. That is why we have tabled the amendments.

Basically, the Government definitions, as laid out in clause 1(2) and clause 4(2), say that, if a court reasonably believes that someone's actions constitute harassment or are causing fear of violence, then they are. As the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) said, it is not inconceivable—I know that this might be welcomed by Conservative Members and indeed by some Labour Members—that that could generate much additional work for lawyers.

As the Bill stands, theoretically, people engaging in innocent activities, of which a judge happens to disapprove, could be caught. They may include shouting at a referee from the terraces at a football match on more than one occasion. I hope that the Minister will reassure us about that.

It is some two and a half years since the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) first moved an amendment to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to seek to establish a criminal offence of stalking. As, I am sure, the Minister knows, that amendment had been drafted for her by the Police Federation, which had long called for such a criminal offence.

The definition that we are seeking to add to the Government's Bill is not exhaustive. It would strengthen the Bill. I admit I am not a lawyer but, whatever Conservative Members say, they have not yet answered whether they think that our Bill—essentially we are seeking to put the majority of my definition into the Government's Bill—is too wide or too narrow. Perhaps the Minister will deal with that again when he responds.

The purpose of amendments Nos. 12 and 18 is to give guidance to the courts. If judges are to apply this Bill, they will need clearer terms of reference than the Government have provided. Otherwise, we estimate a possible rash of costly and time-consuming appeals, which is presumably why the hon. and learned Member for Burton said that it would provide work for lawyers.

Other countries, such as the United States, Canada and Australia, have all introduced laws to combat stalking and we know that the Government have been considering those laws closely in their efforts to find the workable definition that the Home Secretary was after. We also considered the experience of those countries when drawing up our stalking Bill. The relevant law in those countries often gives greater guidance to the courts as to what might constitute stalking. Activities such as pursuing or following a person, unwarranted surveillance, lying in wait for someone, non-consensual communication and trespass all feature in the definitions used in those countries.

The Minister said in written answers to me that the Government did not feel the need to have such a list system. One of their reasons was that many of those activities were already offences in Britain. I should be

grateful if the Minister would go through the activities that are specified in other countries' legislation and tell us precisely where they are offences in Britain.

We based amendments Nos. 12 and 18 on the definition employed in Queensland, Australia, and elements of the best practice of the US and Canada. It is virtually the same as the definition in the Stalking Bill and lays out the most common examples of stalking activity.

It is not our intention to detract in any way from the proposals in the Government's Bill. We merely seek to give greater guidance to the courts when they implement the Bill's provisions.

Mr. Maclean: It may not be the Opposition's intention to detract in any way from the Bill's provisions, but the unintended effect of their amendment is that it diminishes the protections in the Bill. It is not just a matter of my opinion. It is a matter of the technicalities of construction of statute law. The danger with the list system is that the court will have to construe the provision according to the items on the list. If a phrase such as "and any other activity" is inserted, the court, under the ejusdem generis rule, must construe those other activities narrowly, according to the general characteristics that have already been given in the long list that the hon. Lady provided.

There is another practical difficulty. I do not know how anyone present in the Chamber could face a victim in a couple of years. After the Bill has had its Third Reading and comes back from another place, we will all be making speeches and saying that we have now given victims protection and that never again will poor, innocent victims be subject to stalkers. In a couple of years we will find that some weirdo is stalking women and abusing some activity that has not been caught in the list. That is the danger.

The hon. Lady said that her list was not exhaustive. Of course it is not exhaustive, nor is it complete. I would be more relaxed about a list system if I thought that it could be complete. Unfortunately, we are dealing with people who have some very weird ideas, and there are potentially hundreds of such people, or thousands if the Bill does not deter them. They can get up to pretty weird activities. It is impossible to define all the stalking activities that people could get up to. That is why it is best to stick to the harassment definition and concentrate on the effect of the weird activity on the victim.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): The opening phrase of amendment No. 2 states:

"Without prejudice to the generality of subsection 2".

Surely that covers the Minister's objection. The Labour amendment simply expands on that point.

Mr. Maclean: For the umpteenth time: no, it does not. Adding a catch-all at the end does not achieve what it seems to achieve. Judges must interpret catch-alls at the end of lists in statute according to certain rules that the courts have developed for the way in which they go about interpretation. The ejusdem generis rule assumes that, if Parliament added a catch-all, Parliament intended it to be interpreted according to the other characteristics in the list. It is not a wide-ranging catch-all. The best catch-all is to stick to the word "harassment".

That is not just my opinion; it is the opinion that we got after consultation. The Government did not pluck out of thin air the idea of plain, bald harassment, without considering any other ideas or suggestions. That is the suggestion that we put in our consultation paper. Following that wide-ranging consultation, there was widespread support for the proposal to use the concept of harassment and to concentrate on the effect of the activity on the victim, making that the criminal offence, rather than trying to define a list of activities that Parliament thought bad at one particular time, knowing full well that stalkers and those who harass victims are, by their very nature, dashed clever at finding other weird activities.

I shall quote what my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said when he quoted a victim at the Suzy Lamplugh Trust conference. Those words should be burned on our brains before we come to a view on this part of the Bill. That victim—not a politician or a lawyer—said:

"If you have a list of activities which you ban, my stalker will simply sit down and work out another activity with which to torment me."

I do not want to stand in the House in two years or write letters to my constituents or those of other hon. Members, explaining how the law was inadequate because we went for a list and some weirdo got round the list and made life hell for another victim. We do not have to do that, because the proposals in the Bill represent the best way of tackling the problem.

8.15 pm

Let us not worry about what any one of a thousand activities might be. Let us worry about the effect on the victim. If the effect is to cause harassment to the victim, we can trigger the offence and the provisions in the Bill for civil remedy and criminal defences.

I could say more on the clause. I have not discussed some of the other amendments, which I do not think have been moved. I give way to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), then I shall conclude.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister realise that, as a result of fairly recent judgments, what Ministers say in the House can be taken into account by the courts? Will he go through the list in amendment No. 12 and tell us which activities he would expect not to be covered, so that it is on the record in the House that he thinks that proposed subsections (a) to (f) are covered by his definition?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands the ruling in Pepper *v.* Hart, which suggested that the comments of Ministers may be taken into account if there is ambiguity. However, when a Bill states that something is black, it is no good a Minister saying that it is white. The court will still interpret the word as "black". We cannot use our words, however nimbly we put them across, to change the meaning of the Bill, if the meaning is crystal clear; nor can I make any comment at the Dispatch Box that would influence the way in which judges use the long-established rules of interpretation to interpret a list.

The hon. Gentleman is trying to make bricks without straw. I understand his reasons. He has tabled all the Liberty amendments. It may be legitimate for him to take that position, but his amendments would pull the teeth of the Bill. There would be nothing left to give protection to victims. I do not go so far as to say that the amendment tabled by the official Opposition would fundamentally

[Mr. Maclean]

destroy the Bill, as the hon. Gentleman's amendments would—there would be no Bill left. The Opposition amendment would narrow the scope of this part of the Bill to a narrowly defined list.

Stalkers do not stick to the activities on a list. Stalkers and other weirdos who pursue women, cause racial harassment and annoy their neighbours have a wide range of activity which it is impossible to define. The result of our consultation exercise suggested overwhelmingly that the approach in the Bill is the best one. Therefore, I am not persuaded to fly in the face of the consultation exercise, the expert advice that we received and the views of victims of stalking, especially a victim who told us clearly:

"If you have a list of activities which you ban, my stalker will simply sit down and work out another activity with which to torment me."

For those reasons, and that one in particular, I cannot accept the amendment.

Mrs. Fyfe: I have lost of count of the Government Bills that I have seen which began with the preamble that,

"without prejudice to the generality"

of a particular section, the following detailed provisions would apply. After his remarks to the Committee, will the Minister and his colleagues revise all the legislation that has been passed in the past umpteen years to remove such particulars? That is the logic of what he has said.

If the Minster's objective is to avoid rendering judges obtuse or stupid in their interpretation of the legislation, I suggest that amendment No. 12 would help. A judge would not be able to say that following someone, loitering near them, telephoning them and making flattering remarks, or sending them presents, was not harassment. Even the thickest of those on judicial benches would regard such behaviour as harassment.

Mr. Maclean: Looking down the list, I was immediately struck by its deficiency. For example—off the top of my head—it omits such activities as driving past a victim's house. That is not contained in the amendment, although loitering and watching are. What about the person who continually drives past someone's house, or harassment by direct speech, letters to the press, acts committed against a third party—such as the victim's spouse or children—or acts committed by a third party? Those examples are not covered. I have already provided half a dozen examples, and there may be others.

I do not consider myself to be a weirdo—although others may disagree—so I have not thought of all the weird permutations of behaviour that could be used to get round a list. However, if hon. Members have already found deficiencies in the list, within hours of reading the amendments, we can bet our bottom dollar that stalkers out there somewhere would change and refine their activities to get round it.

We should not be in any doubt that some activities, such as driving past a victim's house, is not caught by the amendment. Other activities may be caught, or they may not be. We should bear in mind that deterrence will be one of the best effects of the legislation. Police officers have said that their current difficulty is that they cannot tell a stalker, "Stop it, sonny, because you're breaking the law." Stalkers know that certain actions do not necessarily break the law. The Bill's provisions will enable police to advise many people that, if they persist with their conduct, they will be breaking the law.

"Harassment" catches a wide range of conduct and potentially allows such behaviour to be considered as breaking the law. A narrow list will enable police to tick off, reprimand and deter only those whose activities exactly match those on the list. It is not good enough to have grey areas or to say, "Driving past a victim's house may or may not be caught." A list system creates such ambiguity. Some conduct will be excluded directly, but other conduct will have an ambiguous status. That is my answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe).

Mr. Bennett: I am disappointed by the Minister's response, because I thought that the purpose of the Bill's Committee stage was to try to achieve constructive results. I understand the difficulty that an offence will be extremely difficult to prove if, as my amendments propose, we say "knowingly" and remove "ought to know" because of the issue of intent. Equally, it is a pretty good principle in law that, so far as possible, we should make it clear to people that they are in danger of breaking the law. Therefore, we should be trying to achieve clarity. I understand that difficulty, and I appreciate the way in which the Minister has made the point that, as soon as we make a list, there will be a problem with people who deliberately try to get round it. I accept that.

When I moved my amendment, I suggested to the Minister the development of a code of practice or regulations that would provide the necessary interpretation. I can also understand the difficulties with that approach, but I should have thought that he could at least provide the Committee with a firm list of such behaviour. As he said, a judge would not have to take specific notice of a list, but such a list would at least clearly express the Government's views.

In the course of proceedings on the Bill, I hope that Ministers will make it clear that they accept the list in amendment No. 12. If the Minister or his advisers can think of other examples of such behaviour, they should be included—so that people are at least provided with some clarification of the law on which to base their conduct.

I understand the Minister's argument that a police officer should be able to say, "Because of this general rule on harassment, that behaviour is covered." But, as the Minister has already pointed out, some of those people are extremely awkward, persistent and cussed, and they will not be deterred merely because a police officer says that a course of conduct is covered. They will be very tempted to pursue the matter through the courts. Such uncertainty will continue until there is a series of court judgments clarifying what is meant in the clause by "harassment" and what is meant by "reasonable".

I appeal to the Minister to look again for some way in which to provide general guidance stating that the conduct listed in amendment No. 12 and the conduct that he mentioned are clearly examples of harassment. The guidance should make it clear that, if one persists with such activities, they will be caught by the clause, and it should not close the door on including those activities. I should have thought that the Minister could come up with guidance that is sufficiently inventive to meet the

need of clarifying the legislation, so that people are clear that certain activities will be treated as harassment and that others may also be so treated.

I do not want to press my amendment to a vote, but I should have thought that—tomorrow, during the Bill's Report stage—many Opposition Members will want to return to the subject. Therefore, I ask the Minister to think whether guidance can be given, without, as he suggested might happen, narrowing the definition of the offence. On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw amendment No. 1.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Is amendment No. 12 to be moved formally?

Ms Janet Anderson: Dame Janet, may I reply to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett)?

The Second Deputy Chairman: Unfortunately, it is not possible to have further debate on that group of amendments as amendment No. 1 has been withdrawn. If the hon. Lady wishes to move amendment No. 12 formally, she may do so.

Ms Anderson: No.

Mrs. Maddock: I beg to move amendment No. 30, in page 1, line 15, leave out from 'shows' to 'under' in line 17 and insert,

'that in the particular circumstances the pursuit of the course of conduct was reasonable—

(a) for the purpose of preventing and detecting crime, or'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 31, in page 1, line 19, leave out from 'enactment' to end of line 21.

No. 28, in page 1, line 21, at end insert 'or

(d) that it was pursued for the purpose of investigating a tort, suspected civil wrong or other matter, where a bona fide investigation is required in the interests of justice.'.

No. 6, in clause 4, clause 4, page 2, line 41, leave out from 'reasonable' to end of line 43.

Mrs. Maddock: Before the Minister replies to my speech and points out the flaws in my amendments, I should like to mention again the speed with which we had to draft them. I regret that, because of my speed in doing so, the amendments do not achieve what they were intended to do. They were intended to deal with the issue of "reasonableness", which has already been mentioned in the debate.

In clauses 1 and 4, immunity from prosecution is provided to people if they can demonstrate that they were acting for purposes of preventing or detecting crime—as all hon. Members would think sensible. Obviously, in many circumstances, tailing a suspected criminal is justified, and my intention was not to interfere with that provision. However, the Bill's wording caused me to be concerned about whether it would allow people acting to prevent or detect crime to harass other people to an unacceptable or unreasonable degree. The Bill seems to contain no such qualification.

That issue has already been mentioned by the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), who spoke about private detectives engaging in such behaviour. Another example which has already been mentioned in the debate is bailiffs, who may find that they are able to harass people on the basis of subsections (a) and (b). I hope that the Minister will reassure us on that matter. He has already briefly spoken about the issue of "reasonableness". The amendments' purpose was to probe that issue and to seek reassurances from the Government that people are not able to claim that they are carrying out some other, legitimate purpose when they are, in fact, harassing other people.

Mr. George: I shall speak to amendment No. 28, which is another probing amendment. I should like assurances from the Minister about the position of various people who conduct a range of legitimate investigations—they may be called private investigators, but other, more disparaging expressions, have also been used regularly. Their names do not always appear in the *Yellow Pages* as private investigators, but they frequently pursue investigations on behalf of the Crown—directly or indirectly—or on behalf of other organisations or individuals. I am not yet convinced—I hope to be convinced by the Minister—that sufficient thought has been given to provide the necessary defences for anyone pursuing a legitimate investigation.

8.30 pm

I tabled the amendment to allow the Minister to discuss with his civil servants the point that many private eyes undertake investigations with no criminal connotations. I mentioned earlier a list—I know that putting down a list is not conducive to gaining the Minister's support—of activities that are not directed to criminal investigations. The list includes investigating industrial accidents, matrimonial inquiries, the taking of statements, interviewing for witness statements, tracing missing persons and process serving.

I have looked at a text book on private investigation written by a gentleman named Ackroyd. On page 104 of his book, "The Investigator", he says, on the subject of process serving:

"To make what is termed a 'good service' it is only necessary to touch some part of the individual's body with the actual document."

I wonder whether touching an individual with a document, even though it may be a copy of a document provided by a court, might be considered harassment, resulting in the bailiff, the process server or the investigator being called to the attention of the police.

The list of activities that may not have criminal connotations also includes providing evidence for a local authority on anti-social neighbours, the vetting of potential and existing staff, and debt recovery. I hope to convince the Minister of the necessity of a stronger defence than that provided by the clause. The defence of an action in subsection (3)(a)—

"that it was pursued for the purpose of preventing or detecting crime"—

might appear fine, but the argument of what is reasonable is problematic.

The Minister speaks with some knowledge on the private security industry, although his views may not always correspond to mine. He knows that some people

[Mr. George]

might say that certain activities of the private security industry were reasonable and others might consider the same activities definitely unreasonable. Whether many of the manifold duties of a private investigator were reasonable may have to be tested in court. A judge's definition of what was reasonable might be a matter of considerable controversy. It would be easier—I shall not go into detail on this—for professional private investigators to argue their case if their profession was regulated and they conformed to standards laid down by law. Being a licensed investigator would provide a greater defence for certain activities.

Many, if not the majority, of the activities of private investigators are not related to criminal proceedings. The Bill is imprecise—indeed, confusing. Subsection (3)(c) might exempt investigators whose investigations were proved reasonable, but that is too vague and could lead to some legitimate investigators being subject to civil and perhaps even criminal action.

I do not believe that that was the objective of the Home Office in drawing up the legislation. The consultation paper issued in July said:

"There is a risk that if the scope of any new legislation to deal with stalking is not carefully defined"—

I do not think that it has been—

"it will criminalise the everyday behaviour of innocent people".

I do not want to argue about whether the definition is too wide or too narrow. I shall say only that when I was in the academic profession I often set the same examination question, asking students to consider a statement such as, "Legislation is more the function of the Executive than of the legislature." If I were pitched once again—against my will—into the profession that I willingly left, I might have to revise that statement to, "Legislation is as much the function of the judiciary as of the legislature." The broad definition bestows an enormous responsibility on the courts to do what we are unwilling or unable to do.

I have said that we need clarification on what is reasonable for private investigators. Obviously, investigators want to know whether it would be reasonable to pursue a party suspected of making a fraudulent personal injury insurance claim. They would want to know at the outset whether the suspicion was justified. The only way to establish the truth would be to keep the individual under surveillance.

In a second example, investigators might also justifiably want to know whether it would be considered reasonable to keep surveillance on an individual suspected by his employer of working for a third party or on a freelance basis. The investigator would not know the truth until the observations had been completed.

In a third example, investigators might also want to know whether it would be reasonable to keep observations on an estranged spouse who was claiming maintenance on the premise that she was not cohabiting with a third party or was not in gainful employment. The investigator would not know whether the maintenance claim was justified without establishing whether the estranged spouse was cohabiting or was employed.

A fourth problem is whether it would be considered reasonable to keep observations on a person to be able to serve that individual with some form of legal process such as a High Court writ or an injunction. Occasionally, it would be necessary to stake out a person's residence to effect service of legal documents when the subject was evasive.

Many other examples that occur daily in the lives of investigators have arisen from my consultations. Without the ability to keep people and their homes under surveillance, it will not be possible to establish the truth in a case.

Investigators frequently act in legal aid cases when the Legal Aid Board is seeking the recovery of money from litigants. Unless investigators have exemptions from the Bill, they will be unable to fulfil effectively the assignments given to them by the courts, inevitably inhibiting the ability of the Legal Aid Board to recover outstanding costs.

Virtually all surveillance activities by private investigators are of a covert nature. As long as the surveillance is legitimate, one hopes that the target does not know that it has taken place until it has been concluded and a report appears before them or the person who hired the investigator.

However, that cannot always happen. Sometimes the subject becomes aware of the surveillance. In such cases, the surveillance is discontinued or postponed until the target's fears have been allayed. It is important to clarify how the Bill will affect private investigators conducting legitimate investigations on behalf of their clients.

It is principally the legitimate investigator who has a problem with the measure, not the criminal element in the profession, which will not be deterred by new laws. I am assured that legitimate investigators are anxious to work within the law. However, if the Bill is passed without clarification of clause 1(3)(c) or adequate assurances from the Minister, it will be regarded as confusing and damaging by legitimate investigators who do a good job within the law.

Good, legal investigators, hon. Members and the overwhelming majority of public opinion support the principle of the Bill and applaud any measure that deters stalkers and protects the innocent from harassment. However, in the interests of justice, there must be some provision to protect legitimate investigators conducting bona fide inquiries from prosecution and civil action. I am not trying to destroy the Bill's intention and I hope that I can get assurances. In those circumstances, I would freely withdraw my amendment.

Mr. Bennett: My amendment No. 6 is in this group. As the Minister is keen to keep the Bill as general as possible to catch all forms of possible harassment, why cannot he keep the possible defence equally general under clause 4(3)(c)? It seems much better to have

"the pursuit of his course of conduct was reasonable"

than to qualify it as he has done.

Mr. Maclean: Amendments Nos. 30 and 31 are unacceptable. They would prevent any activity that is not carried on reasonably for the prevention or detection of crime or under any enactment. Many activities, such as journalism, doorstep selling and political canvassing, may cause harassment but are legitimate if undertaken reasonably. We proposed in our consultation paper, which was published in the summer, that such activities should

be protected, and the response was overwhelming agreement. The Bill recognises that and safeguards those activities by providing a defence for any activities that, in the particular circumstances, were reasonable. The amendments would do away with that safeguard and make illegal all sorts of legitimate activities, which would make the scope of the Bill far too wide. That is why we cannot accept the amendments.

8.45 pm

I listened closely to the hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), and I have considered amendment No. 28 carefully. The civil law relates to disputes between two parties; there is no question of public policy being involved. When investigators are examining a matter of tort, it would be wrong to give either party to a dispute special privileges under the criminal law. The amendment does not wreck the Bill but it is unnecessary. If the action of a party to a dispute is reasonable, it will be covered by the general defence provided in clause 1(3)(c):

"that in the particular circumstances the pursuit of the course of conduct was reasonable."

That would apply to whole categories of people, such as journalists, politicians, doorstep sellers and people who canvass on religious matters. It would certainly cover, in the legitimate course of conduct, the activities of private investigators and security guards. It comes down to whether someone's activity is reasonable.

Furthermore, someone must claim that they have been harassed. Many of the activities of private investigators mentioned by the hon. Member for Walsall, South involved the person under investigation being unaware of the presence of the private investigator. That person could not fear alarm or distress; there is no harassment and no need for a defence. Only if a person under investigation became aware of being followed, or claimed that he was being stalked, and it happened a second time and the person tried to take action, would it be for a court to decide whether the activities of the private investigator were reasonable.

I cannot give precise examples—the hon. Gentleman quoted many—but it would always depend on the facts of the case: how the private investigator went about the activity that is challenged in court. As so many activities could be undertaken and challenged, I cannot give examples of whether one activity was reasonable and another not; it would depend on the actions of the person concerned and the effect that they had on the victim.

Clause 1(3)(c) is adequate for all those involved in legitimate crime prevention activity, such as private investigators or private security personnel; that would also apply to all other people. On Second Reading, we discussed whether it would be legitimate conduct for a Member of Parliament to badger an organisation to get an answer for a constituent. If constituents tried to solve problems, could they badger someone? Of course they could. If someone tried to claim that such a constituent's activity was unreasonable, it would be for a court, if it ever came to it, to decide whether the behaviour involved in an attempt to badger an organisation for an answer—or get something fixed, or goods delivered on time or services provided—was reasonable.

Amendment No. 6 would provide a general defence to the offence of pursuing a course of conduct that causes another to fear violence. The Bill already provides defences to that offence where the conduct of the person was: for the purpose of preventing or detecting crime; under any enactment or rule of law; or reasonable for the protection of himself or another or for the protection of his or another's property. The amendment would extend the defences to any circumstances in which the conduct was reasonable. That cannot be accepted.

The similar general defence of acting reasonably in the case of the lower-level offence of causing harassment has been provided in recognition of activities such as journalism and political proselytising, which may cause harassment but are legitimate and should be protected. That consideration does not apply to the higher-level offence of causing fear of violence. It is clearly not reasonable to put someone in fear of violence through doorstep selling or religious or political proselytising. We should keep that defence for exceptional circumstances, and those circumstances are clearly set out in the Bill. For the reasons that I have given, I hope that hon. Members will withdraw their amendments.

Mrs. Maddock: I accept from the way in which the Minister gently rejected my amendments, given the vigour with which he has rejected others, that he understood my points. I listened carefully to his remarks about what constitutes reasonable conduct. I hope that his reassurances are right. I suspect that questions about what is reasonable conduct will be raised again in another place. In view of his comments, and of the time, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Bennett: I have some doubt about the words "A person" at the very beginning of the clause. On Second Reading, the Government were keen to suggest that the Bill covered harassment not only by individuals but by groups. Opposition Members were especially concerned about racial harassment, in which a group of people could be either actively or passively involved. Can the Minister explain how the phrase "A person" covers activities, such as racial harassment or families warring with their neighbours, for which groups are responsible? Should not we perhaps use a phrase such as "a group of persons acting with common intent"?

Mr. Maclean: We believe that the wording is adequate to deal with those cases in which individuals may be harassing someone, perhaps for racial motives. It is best to leave the wording "A person", bearing in mind that the majority of the classic stalking problems that we are dealing with involve individuals. Even in neighbour disputes, with families involved, and in racial harassment, it should be possible to identify the one individual, or the various individuals in the group, who are causing the problems.

I do not know of any instances in which courts convict people in groups. Even if half a dozen people are engaged in a robbery, murder or other crime, they must be served with a summons, charged and sentenced individually; and often they get different sentences. In those circumstances, the language in the Bill is adequate to catch the bulk of

[Mr. Maclean]

individual, targeted, classic stalking activity, and should also catch those who may be involved in neighbour disruption or racial harassment.

Mr. Bennett: That answer is helpful, but does not fulfil the promise that was made on Second Reading. As I understand it, if a family is causing trouble to the next-door neighbours, it is not sufficient to serve the head of the household with an order; each individual has to be named.

Mr. Maclean: I can see no difficulty in that whatever. It would be justice, because if a family generally is causing trouble, one member of that family may not be involved. It would not be acceptable in British law—and certainly not in the European Court of Human Rights—to tarnish or convict a whole family, when individuals in it are innocent of the charge. If one did that, why stop at this law? To take the idea to extremes, why not convict whole families of murder, robbery or drug dealing when one member or a few members of it are involved?

Mr. Streeter: We could put that in the manifesto.

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend is tempting me into a commitment. If I had the prison places, I might consider it.

Seriously, though, what the hon. Gentleman is suggesting is not necessary; the provisions in the Bill catch the activity to which he refers. If we want to deal with half a dozen people in a family who are causing trouble, we have to get the individuals by name; we have to do that in any case to get any conviction under any rule of law of which I am aware.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

OFFENCE OF HARASSMENT

Mr. Bennett: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 24, leave out 'summary'.

The Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 3, in page 1, line 25, after 'conviction', insert 'on indictment'.

Mr. Bennett: I realise that the Government want to differentiate between clauses 1 and 2 and clauses 3 and 4, but would not the decision on what is harassment and what is reasonable be far better taken by a jury than merely by magistrates?

Mr. Kirkhope: I am somewhat puzzled by the amendments. The effect would be to require the person charged with the offence of harassment to be tried in the Crown court rather than the magistrates court. I am puzzled because the amendment does not propose any corresponding increase in penalty. The penalty set out in the Bill—a six-month sentence of imprisonment or a level 5 fine, or both—is the maximum penalty available for any offence tried in the magistrates court. It would be an unjustifiable waste of resources to deal in the Crown court with an offence that attracted those penalties. It would also create unnecessary delays.

The amendments also run contrary to the general thrust of the past 20 years or so to find ways of ensuring that cases which can be dealt with in the magistrates court are retained there. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not trying to attack the excellent justice meted out by our magistrates courts. The pressure of time and the delays in the Crown court, as well as the much higher costs attendant on trials there, also militate against what he suggests. I can find no other reason for his suggesting the changes.

As the royal commission specifically recognised, if more business is retained in the magistrates court, more resources can be devoted to ensuring that the more serious cases going to the Crown court are better prepared and more quickly heard. It is in no one's interest to increase unnecessarily the number of cases sent for trial to the Crown court. In those circumstances, I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Bennett: If someone's reputation is at stake and rests on the question of what is harassment and what is reasonable, there is a much greater safeguard in being able to put a case for the defence to a jury rather than to magistrates, many of whom, perhaps as a result of their jobs, become somewhat case-hardened. However, I realise that the Committee wants to make progress, and on that basis I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Kirkhope: I beg to move amendment No. 42, in page 2, leave out lines 1 and 2 and insert—

'(3) In section 24(2) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (arrestable offences), after paragraph (m) there is inserted—

"(n) an offence under section 2 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 (harassment).".'.

The amendment replaces the power of arrest provision in the Bill with somewhat stronger provisions which accrue to offences that are arrestable under the provisions of section 24 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

I am persuaded that the additional powers are needed for the police to deal effectively with stalkers. The power under section 18 of the 1984 Act for the police to search for evidence is particularly relevant and necessary if the menace of stalking is to be tackled effectively.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 2, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

CIVIL REMEDY

Mrs. Maddock: I beg to move amendment No. 33, in page 2, line 6, after 'claim', insert 'for an actual breach.'

The purpose of the amendment is to make explicit what we believe is the Government's intention anyway—that damages are not awardable where there has been only an apprehended breach but no actual breach of section 1. I seek reassurance from the Government.

Mr. Streeter: I am afraid that I am unable to give the hon. Lady the assurance she seeks, because, if the

amendment were accepted, it might be thought that damages claims should be limited to cases in which harassment had actually occurred. On the face of it, it is not easy to see how it could be claimed that damages should be awarded for something that has not—or at least not yet—happened. Part of our problem is that we are trying to legislate for a wide range of behaviour. It is conceivable, for example, that even the anticipation of harassment could, in particularly vulnerable people, cause anxiety or loss. A situation may build up over a period of time and be about to reach boiling point.

The Government would prefer to leave it to the courts to decide in the individual case whether the award of damages was appropriate. The courts are very good at considering specific circumstances and tailoring the order to meet a particular set of facts. The courts' existing powers enable that to happen effectively. Before the court awards damages, it must first be persuaded that the victim has—under this legislation—suffered anxiety or loss. The court will not award damages unless it is persuaded on the evidence that that has happened. A defendant who feels that the court's judgment in that regard is wrong may, of course, appeal against the judgment.

Although the Government recognise the point that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) is trying to make in the amendment, we think that the courts' existing powers cover the point adequately and that the amendment is therefore unnecessary.

Mrs. Maddock: In view of the Minister's comments, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

9 pm

Mr. George Howarth: I beg to move amendment No. 13, in page 2, line 8, at end insert—

'(2A) In proceedings under this section a court may, if it appears just and appropriate to do so, order that the person who has been found to have pursued the course of conduct amounting to harassment, to attend a course of counselling with a named person or organisation for the purpose of persuading him not to harass the victim or any other person in the future.'.

The Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: No. 15, in clause 5, page 3, line 21, at end insert—

'(2A) The order may, for the purpose of persuading the defendant not to pursue a course of conduct likely to cause harassment to the victim of the offence or any other person in the future, provide that the defendant attend a course of counselling with a named person or organisation.'.

No. 16, in clause 5, page 3, line 26, after 'defendant', insert

'fails to do anything which he has been ordered to do or'.

No. 24, in clause 8, clause 8, page 4, line 36, at end insert—

'(c) grant an order, if it appears just and appropriate to do so, requiring the defender to attend a course of counselling with a named person or organisation for the purpose of persuading him not to harass the pursuer or any other person in the future'.

No. 26, in clause 11, clause 11, page 6, line 41, at end insert—

'(6A) A non-harassment order may, for the purpose of persuading the defendant not to pursue a course of conduct likely to cause harassment to the victim of the offence or any other person in the future, provide that the offender attend a course of counselling with a named person or organisation'.

No. 19, in clause 14, clause 14, page 7, line 13, at beginning insert

'Subject to subsection (2A) below,'.

No. 20, in clause 14, page 7, line 15, at beginning insert

'Subject to subsection (2A) below,'.

No. 21, in clause 14, page 7, line 16, at end insert—

'(2A) The Secretary of State or, as the case may be, the Lord Chancellor, may provide that section 3(2A) or section 5(2A) shall come into force in different areas of England and Wales in different ways.'.

Mr. Howarth: Amendment No. 13 and those associated with it cover the issue of counselling for those who are convicted of stalking or harassment in one form or another.

I should make it clear what the Opposition mean by counselling. We mean not some pleasant chat over a cup of tea between the perpetrator and some qualified counsellor, but the sort of counselling that forces offenders to face up to their offending behaviour, the effects that it has had and what its consequences can be. I will cite some examples of what I mean by that later.

The amendments are basically permissive; they give the courts the option to rule as part of an order or sentence that some form of counselling will take place. At present, the civil courts have no such power and the amendments provide a constructive remedy, especially in "sad cases" where a criminal conviction may be inappropriate.

The Government's definition of harassment, as set out in clause 1, says that what the defendant

"knows or ought to know amounts to harassment".

It is therefore clear that the defendant, even once convicted, may genuinely believe that his or her behaviour was quite reasonable.

Amazing though that may seem to reasonable people such as hon. Members, there are circumstances in which people simply do not realise that what they have done is wrong. That attitude is typical of those who commit offences that are directed toward another person—a good example being a rapist, who will cite the fact that the victim was "provocatively dressed" or that the victim said no, but really meant yes. Even more bizarre to many of us, but which happens, is the child abuser who argues that they were led on by the child.

All of us know, because we are reasonable and coherent people, that such statements are neither sufficient excuses nor reasonable explanations for such behaviour. The truth, with which the Prison Service has had to come to terms, is that people often delude themselves into believing that an incident was not their fault. The point of programmes which are already very successful in some prisons is that they remove any reason for people to continue with the self-delusion that they were in some way not responsible for the actions that they perpetrated. By introducing the concept of counselling into the Bill, we hope that those who have committed an offence will have to address the root causes of the problems that they have created by the nature of their behaviour. That, simply, is what we seek to do.

Of course, there will also be stalkers who are well aware of the impact of their behaviour on victims. They, too, should be forced to confront their offending behaviour. Merely placing restrictive orders on them may or may not be sufficient to remedy the problem.

[Mr. Howarth]

If the Minister can give me assurances that our concerns can be taken into account, and that remedies along the lines that I have described will be available, we may reconsider our position. None the less, at this stage I want to register the fact that we regard this matter as vital, and that I shall probably wish to press it to a Division.

There are many examples of stalkers convicted of offences such as breaches of the peace, or making nuisance telephone calls, who learn to restrict their behaviour and keep just within the law. That is a worrying phenomenon, and the Bill as presently constructed may allow such people to slip through the net.

The most effective way to stop harassment is to remove the root cause. A stalker who has been forced to address his own offending behaviour and no longer wishes to harass the victim is far less of a threat than one whose only motive in not committing further offences is the fear of legal retribution, important though that is. We owe it to the victims of harassment to ensure that stalkers are forced to confront their behaviour, and that an order imposed by the court can make them undertake such activity.

There are many examples. I shall not labour them, because all the cases have been mentioned in earlier debates, but they all help to make the case. Vanessa Kennedy, a resident of Lewisham, was subjected to an eight-year ordeal that she describes as psychological torture. She lives in fear of a man who has forced her to change her identity, has destroyed her family and driven her to move house. Vanessa Kennedy has attempted suicide four times, and claims that the perpetrator, Laurence Hammond, threatened to cut her into pieces and make her pay for rejecting him. He would describe in detail how he would torture her and other women, and the images still live in her nightmares. That man has never been forced to address the impact of his offending. Clearly, if the Bill allowed such things to continue without redress, it would not be adequate.

Secondly, I cite the case of Dennis Chambers, which has already been mentioned. The case came to trial earlier this year, and the defendant was acquitted when a jury was not convinced that he had caused "serious or really serious" psychological harm to Margaret Bent. The court was told that he had waited outside her home with a machete on two occasions, and had barricaded her into her office. Chambers admitted to the police that he had registered his car in Miss Bent's name and ensured that she received a string of parking tickets, followed by summonses and visits by bailiffs threatening to seize her property if fines went unpaid. He also admitted kicking her office door open, but denied that that amounted to affray. He said that it was

"a mere act of instinctive criminal damage".

The drip, drip, drip effect of those incidents was not sufficient to achieve a criminal conviction, so there have been no consequences for that man. He has not been forced to face up to his offending behaviour.

The Government may say that proposals to force stalkers to confront their offending behaviour are uncosted and may prove expensive. However, the section of the explanatory and financial memorandum headed "Financial Effects of the Bill", says:

"It is anticipated that approximately 200 extra criminal cases a year will arise".

We do not propose that every one, even of that small number of people, would be compelled to have counselling, so very few cases would be involved.

Amendment No. 21 would provide for counselling to be piloted, so any cost implications could be closely monitored, and would be extremely limited in scope. Moreover, the purpose of counselling would be to prevent further offending, and could therefore reduce future legal costs.

Amendment No. 15 provides the criminal court with the power to order offenders to undergo counselling on conviction. Although magistrates courts can theoretically issue similar orders already, it does us no harm to reiterate the point. The clause also reflects the wording of amendment No. 13. There are examples of cases that highlight the benefit of making stalkers address their offending behaviour, such as the case of Anthony Burstow, who, in March 1996, was jailed for three years for inflicting psychological grievous bodily harm following a three-year hate campaign against a former colleague, Tracey Sant.

The harassment began when Miss Sant decided to end their friendship, but Mr. Burstow refused to accept that. His activities included sending her a soiled sanitary towel, stealing her underwear from a washing line, pouring solvent over her car and writing her sinister notes. This was the first case in which a stalker was convicted of grievous bodily harm, but it took five days of tortuous legal wrangling before the court was able to reach a decision.

A similar example is Perry Southall of east London, who was subjected to an eight-month campaign—involving more than 200 separate incidents—by convicted rapist Clarence Morris, until his conviction in September of this year. Morris was finally convicted of two assault charges after a case in which his barrister, David Stanton, said:

"Is it fair that a young lady who dresses to attract, the queen bee attracting the drones, the queen bee that dresses to kill . . . cries foul because somebody finds her attractive?"

I think that we would all take issue with that statement. In response to that case, the Home Secretary promised that the proposed Bill

"would have the effect of providing proper safeguards against stalking."

It is difficult to envisage how those proper safeguards against further stalking can be provided without making some effort to prevent the root causes of the offence.

I will not detain the Committee with a description of the remaining amendments, which are consequential and follow the same line of argument. Although the Bill starts to provide some remedies, unless and until the unacceptable attitudes that people use to justify some appalling behaviour—mainly towards women—are confronted, and until the offenders are counselled and

forced to confront their offending behaviour and the faults in their approach to other people, the root causes of some of the problems will not be adequately dealt with. This is an important issue and an important principle, and it is one that I hope the Committee will accept if it comes to a vote. We must make sure that the root causes of offensive behaviour are tackled properly by making provision within the Bill for counselling to take place on a statutory basis.

Mr. Streeter: I am afraid that the Government cannot accept the amendment. There is an element of confusion in the mind of the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth), although I recognise that he has tabled the amendment for the best possible motives. He is seeking to give a civil court the ability to grant an order for counselling, but all the examples that he provided would almost certainly be dealt with by the criminal courts when the Bill becomes an Act. The Bill has been introduced to deal with cases such as the Kennedy case, the Chambers case, the Burstow case and the Perry Southall case. They would be criminal cases, and the criminal courts have a full panoply of powers available to them to deal with the very points that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Amendments Nos. 13 and 24—which seek to empower the civil courts, when making an order under either clause 3 or clause 8, to order that a defendant receives counselling—are not acceptable for the following three clear reasons.

First, the purpose of the civil remedy is to enable a victim to obtain protection from harassment or anticipated harassment, not to provide a forum for determining appropriate treatment for the defendant. A civil court is not normally expected to make what amounts to a treatment order. Such an order is analogous to a punishment order and is not really appropriate for a civil court.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister not recognise that he is pushing the Bill that bit further to deal with neighbour disputes where harassment is involved? Surely there is a role for counselling when two neighbours are at war with each other and each is probably harassing the other? In such cases, can the Minister not see the advantages of the court being able to tell the parties involved to sit down and talk sensibly to someone who can persuade them that continuing that line of behaviour will not only be illegal, but damaging to themselves and to their neighbours?

9.15 pm

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman knows that a panoply of provision, including counselling, is already available in the multi-agency approach that tends to be taken in respect of such matters these days. Social services might well already be involved in disputes such as he describes, and therefore counselling would be available. Under the existing arrangements, if a court dealing with such a case was persuaded that an undertaking from a defendant to attend a course of counselling was sufficient protection for the victim, either in itself or in addition to other forms of protection, the court could consider that undertaking in deciding what order to make.

We must recognise that it would be a major departure to empower civil courts in the way that is suggested in the amendment. Even if we were minded to accept that civil courts should have the ability to make a treatment order, that order should not be limited to counselling, but should include the full range of provision currently available under the criminal jurisdiction. Singling out counselling, which is only one of a wide range of matters which might feature in a civil court's order, is unhelpful.

Amendment No. 15 and its Scottish equivalent, amendment No. 26, are also unnecessary. Whereas the previous amendments are intended to confer powers on civil courts to direct that a person receives counselling, these amendments would give such powers to criminal courts. However, that adds nothing to the powers of the courts—either under existing law or as provided in the Crime (Sentences) Bill—to order medical treatment that is likely to be effective in addressing offending behaviour. Courts already have extensive powers under the Mental Health Act 1984 and the Criminal Justice Acts to make hospital orders or to attach conditions of treatment, including therapy by a psychologist, to probation orders. Again, isolating counselling among the wide range of matters which might feature in a restraining order is unhelpful.

With regard to amendment No. 16, the purpose of a restraining order is to set out clearly those activities which are prohibited, and that is the extent to which we consider that restraining orders should go. In addition, to require a person to do certain things is out of keeping with an order which carries a strict liability offence, carrying a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment. I presume that amendment No. 16 is consequential on amendment No. 15 and that it is intended to ensure that a convicted stalker abides by the terms of any order requiring counselling to take place. As I have said, I consider amendment No. 15 to be misguided, and it follows that amendment No. 16 should fall with it.

Amendments Nos. 19 to 21 are consequential on amendments Nos. 13 and 15. I ask that Opposition Members should not press them, or the amendments to which I have just spoken.

Mr. George Howarth: I listened carefully to the Minister's remarks. In the conclusion to my opening speech, I said that we considered this to be an issue of principle. Through the availability of counselling, we seek to nip in the bud, in many instances, a sequence of events which might lead to a serious court case and possibly a prison sentence. We want to be able to move in swiftly and deal with the problem at an early stage so that it does not go too far.

The second part of our argument is that there is strong evidence that in cases such as those that we are discussing today people who somehow delude themselves into believing that their behaviour is acceptable and not beyond the bounds of reason should be forced to confront their offending behaviour.

The Committee needs to send out a powerful message which builds on the Bill's provisions. That message should be that, at the earliest possible stage, and on all subsequent occasions, offending behaviour will be confronted, and, if necessary, that that will be done on a statutory basis. I would feel more comfortable if that were a statutory provision in the Bill. I therefore urge my hon. Friends and others to join us in the Lobby to put it there.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 179, Noes 172.

Division No. 32] **[9.19 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Austin–Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Beith, A J
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Davies, Chris *(Littleborough)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, John
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Eastham, Ken
Ennis, Jeffrey
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross C & S)*
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretf'd)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Mrs Diana
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Ms Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thurnham, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms Angela Eagle and
Mr. Greg Pope.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Coe, Sebastian
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Cope, Sir John
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas–Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evennett, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Garel–Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson–Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Horam, John
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox–Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain

Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pawsey, James
Pickles, Eric
Porter, David
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, John
Renton, Tim
Richards, Rod
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond S *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rumbold, Dame Angela
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Shersby, Sir Michael
Sims, Sir Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Spicer, Sir Jim *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Stephen, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Roger Knapman and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ms Janet Anderson: I beg to move amendment No. 14, in page 2, line 8, at end insert—

'(2B) In considering whether to order an injunction in proceedings under this section, a court shall have primary regard to whether such an order is necessary for the protection of what the court considers are the victim's legitimate interests.'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 29, in page 2, line 8, at end insert—

'(2A) Civil proceedings which include a claim under this section for an injunction shall not be referred to arbitration (whether under section 64 of the County Courts Act 1984, or otherwise) without the consent of all the parties to the action.'.

No. 4, in page 2, leave out lines 9 to 24.

No. 25, in clause 8, page 4, line 36, at end insert—

'(5B) In considering whether to order an interdict or interim interdict in proceedings under this section, a court shall have primary regard to whether such an order is necessary for the protection of what the court considers are the pursuer's legitimate interests'.

Ms Anderson: Amendment No. 14 would make the test for whether to issue an injunction under civil proceedings as favourable as realistically possible to the victim. It would make it more likely that county court judges would issue civil injunctions in strong prima facie cases of harassment. The Bill seeks to provide a remedy against behaviour that would often otherwise be considered lawful—for example, using the postal system, the public highway, or the telephone would be rendered a civil or criminal offence under the Bill by the effect on the victim. *[Interruption.]* At present, when deciding whether to issue injunctions, the courts are naturally inclined to attach too much weight to potential interference with a harasser's civil liberties. *[Interruption.]*

The Chairman: Order. I apologise for interrupting the hon. Lady. I ask those hon. Members who wish to take part in the Committee to listen to the proceedings, and those hon. Members who wish to talk about other matters to do so outside the Chamber.

Ms Anderson: The amendment would guide a court to consider primarily the victim's point of view during its deliberations. We believe that that is particularly appropriate under this legislation, because a typical injunction would involve only a small interference with the harasser's civil liberties but would serve to set a victim's mind at rest as well as protect the victim from potential future harassment.

The amendment would mean that, for example, when a person goes to court seeking an injunction and the court thinks that, on the balance of probability, the case is pretty 50:50 as to whether an order should be granted, the court should find in favour of the alleged victim and grant the injunction. The amendment's test of considering a victim's legitimate interest was approved by the Court of Appeal, which included the Master of the Rolls, in the judgment handed down in the Burris *v.* Azadani stalking case in July 1995. If the amendment were passed, we believe that the judgment in that case would provide excellent guidance for judges hearing similar applications for injunctions under the Act.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. I seek your help. In view of the way in which the Bill is being proceeded with, there may not be an interval between the Committee and Report stages. I am slightly concerned that, following their recent defeat, the Government might decide to introduce an amendment on Report to reverse our decision this evening. Can you afford some facility to Ministers, who appear to be consulting busily with each other and with civil servants, so that they may give notice to the Committee if they intend to move on Report an amendment—which will probably have to be a manuscript amendment—that will affect our decision?

The Chairman: As far as I am concerned, I am dealing with the Committee stage at the moment. We have a little way to go yet.

Mr. Bennett: Further to that point of order, Mr. Morris. I seek your assistance. It is difficult to table amendments on Report when we do not have a copy of the amended Bill. The order of the Bill will change, because Government and Opposition amendments have been carried. How do we table amendments on Report? Do we make them to the Bill before us or to the Bill as amended? I am sure that you appreciate that it is rare for amendments to be carried in Committee on the Floor of the House. We need some certainty, as the debate could end fairly suddenly and we would be on Report. We need to know how to proceed.

The Chairman: Committee stages on the Floor of the House are often interesting. As far as the Chair is concerned, when the time comes, the order will be intelligible to the House.

Mr. Bennett: My amendment No. 4 is in this group of amendments. It is difficult to bring the Committee back to considering the amendments, as it is fairly unprecedented for the Government to be defeated in this manner. The sooner a Minister comes to the Dispatch Box to tell us how we shall proceed, the better.

I turn to the construction of clause 3, which begins with a civil remedy and builds a criminal offence on to that civil remedy. It is fairly unusual in this country for legislation to muddle criminal and civil court procedures, and I think that there are good reasons for keeping the two separate. The civil courts must balance the differing and conflicting interests of the two parties to the case. They have to decide between the two parties on the question of fairness. That is often extremely difficult, because the difference between the measure of proof on one side and the other may be fairly slim. The alternative approach of the criminal courts is that someone must be found guilty beyond all reasonable doubt.

I am worried about the fact that the issue will first be dealt with by civil proceedings, and if someone is in breach of those proceedings, instead of ensuring that the matter is taken up by the courts as a contempt of court, we are creating a criminal offence. If we make a breach of an action in a civil court a criminal offence, we must make it clear that the same tests should be applied to the civil proceedings as would be applied in the criminal court. The standard of proof in the civil court should not be weaker than that applied in the criminal court.

I suggest that the Government think seriously about the way in which subsections (3), (4), (5) and (6) of clause 3 fit in with the civil remedy. I shall listen with interest to the Minister.

Mrs. Maddock: The amendment would ensure that civil proceedings on a claim for an injunction under the clause would not be referred to arbitration without the consent of all the parties. The purpose of the amendment is to ensure that people can afford to deal with the situation in which they find themselves.

Most civil proceedings take place in the county court. A system of arbitration without lawyers' fees was created 20 years ago. As we all know, that system is the small claims court, and its original jurisdiction was claims of £100. That was subsequently increased to £500 and then to £1,000, and recently to £3,000. Claims under that limit, with some exceptions, are compulsorily referred to arbitration.

Until recently, it had been thought that the rules on exceptions meant that claims for injunctions would not be referred, but a court decision has now ruled otherwise. That is already causing problems in disrepair cases. A minor, but inadequate, alleviation to the rules has been made, so that it is a little easier for a case to come back from arbitration, and for a fixed sum of £270 for legal costs to be allowed in an injunction. That is well below the costs of preparing papers and appearing at a hearing—and, possibly, at a return date.

That has had a knock-on effect on legal aid. It may be that the lack of costs recovery in such a case would not prevent legal aid. The purpose of the amendment is to ensure that practical access to the courts remains available, and I hope that the Government will look favourably on it.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): One of the problems of debating amendments in this atmosphere is that we end up with legislation with holes in it. That does not seem to matter to Opposition parties. The amendment that has just been passed undoubtedly weakens the Bill and seeks to drive a coach and horses through it.

The Chairman: Order. We have already discussed the previous amendment—I do not think that the hon. Member was present at the time. We are now on amendment No. 14, which he should be addressing.

Mr. Hughes: You are quite right, Sir Michael.

The Chairman: No, just Chairman or Mr. Morris.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): For 10 more days.

Mr. Hughes: That is disgraceful. You should call my hon. Friend to order, Mr. Morris. I was obviously dazzled by your bow tie.

I was making a point in parenthesis, and alluding to the fact that the Opposition are trying to soften the Bill. Here they go again—this is a good example of that. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) makes long, tough speeches about how Labour will be tough on law and order and will crack down on this and that. He says that, if only the Government would do something, we could get rid of this crime. Then we come to the Committee stage of the Bill, and what happens? The Opposition are concerned not about the victims of these crimes but about what they regard as civil rights. By that, they mean the civil rights of the people who are perpetrating these crimes. That runs through the four amendments that are grouped.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid–Staffordshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that at least one charge that cannot be made against the Labour party is that of inconsistency? Have not Labour Members been consistent in opposing all measures in which we have tried to crack down on crime, and, indeed, on terrorism? They either vote against such measures—

The Chairman: Order. The Bill has absolutely nothing to do with terrorism.

9.45 pm

Mr. Hughes: That was indeed a disgraceful intervention, but my hon. Friend is right. Bills that are currently being delayed in Committee—I shall not list them—could be rushed through the House if we could take the Labour party at its word.

Amendment No. 4 proposes that we leave out a whole lump of the Bill. Why are those exclusions in the Bill in the first place? I think that it comes down to something that we see time and again. In this place, it is easy to be critical of judges and magistrates and the arguments advanced by lawyers, and to say, "Surely they must have

understood what we were trying to do; surely they understand what sort of criminals we are trying to catch. Why have they interpreted the law in that way?"

We all know that it is sometimes difficult to understand the exact intent of a Bill. That does not imply that Ministers do not mean to introduce clauses whose intent is clear, or that the lawyers—the parliamentary draftsmen—do not sweat blood to try to ensure that clauses are comprehensible and will have the desired effect. In the lines that the Labour party wants to leave out, exclusions have been made with the aim of clarifying the legislation, so that matters will be clear when a case comes to court—so that we know why and how people will be convicted, and there will be no let-out in the small print of the Bill.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) wants to leave out those lines, and, for all I know, he is supported by Opposition Front Benchers. If he is not, Opposition Front Benchers will no doubt explain why. The hon. Gentleman seeks to make a muddle of what is currently a very clear Bill.

Amendment No. 25 would insert in clause 8, at line 36, the words:

"In considering whether to order an interdict or interim interdict in proceedings under this section, a court shall have primary regard to whether such an order is necessary for the protection of what the court considers are the pursuer's legitimate interests".

We all see what those who tabled the amendment are trying to protect. We all know that people who could come into that category might well have a legitimate interest, although some of us would find it rather hard to believe that certain journalists have a legitimate interest, given the pursuing that they do.

Because of the form in which those who tabled the amendment are seeking to insert it in the Bill, however, it would have a wrecking effect—although, in procedural terms, it is not a wrecking amendment. I hope that the Committee will resist it, and that the Labour party will not seek to press it. Labour Members found themselves in a numerical majority earlier tonight, and no doubt they are now seeking to make hay with that; but seeking to add amendments such as this to the Bill, and to delete important parts of it, is highly irresponsible.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I have been following my hon. Friend's interesting argument. Does he not accept that the Bill has widespread support, not only in the House but outside, and that hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber—indeed, members of all parties—seek to enact it as early as possible, establishing clear, firm law? Why does he think that the amendments were tabled? They certainly do not add to the strength or reason of the Bill.

Mr. Hughes: Characteristically, my hon. Friend makes his points clearly. He is a clear-spoken man. He knows what he wants, sets out to achieve those things and is much admired in the House of Commons for that.

Mr. Duncan: On a point of order, Mr. Morris. I am confused by the drafting of the amendments, which is self-contradictory. Amendment No. 14 talks about

"the protection of what the court considers are the victim's legitimate interests."

Amendment No. 25 talks about

"the protection of what the court considers are the pursuer's legitimate interests".

I fully understand that that may refer to someone pursuing something in a court of law, but it is highly ambiguous in the context of someone referring to stalking, as it is called, because the pursuer may be seen in the court as a person who is persistently harassing someone. Are we not therefore deliberately and wilfully drawing up ambiguous legislation that may be misinterpreted in a court of law?

The Chairman: In relation to my selection, the guiding factor is whether the amendments are sufficiently cognate to be discussed together, and they are.

Mr. Straw: On a point of order, Mr. Morris. I wish to raise an important point of order for the whole Committee.

As you know, a few minutes ago, the Government were defeated on amendment No. 13, the effect of which is to require county courts to be able to order, where they so wish, counselling with a view to requiring the offenders to confront their offending behaviour. The aim is for the provision to be piloted by courts before coming fully into force throughout Britain. It is unusual, first, for the Government to be defeated by seven votes, as they have been, and, secondly, for progress without agreement to be made so swiftly on a Bill.

As we know, the Report stage will take place tomorrow. In view of that, Mr. Morris, do you agree that, before the 10 o'clock motion, we need a statement from Ministers explaining what their provisional attitude is to the amendment—after all, they have had many days to consider the amendment since it was tabled—and what their intentions are tomorrow when they come before the House? Do they intend to accept the amendment which, properly drafted, can be incorporated into the Bill or to try to remove it?

The Chairman: This is not a matter for the occupant of the Chair, but those on the Treasury Bench will have heard the hon. Gentleman and will seek to respond as they believe appropriate.

Mr. Straw: Further to that point of order, Mr. Morris. The Minister of State has now come into the Chamber. He is in charge of the Committee proceedings on the Bill. That part of the proceedings is due to finish at 10 o'clock. May we hear from him whether he intends to make a statement tonight, bearing it in mind that, for the convenience of the House, amendments for the Report stage will need to be tabled tonight or, at the latest, tomorrow morning? May I have your clarification on that as well?

The Chairman: Hon. Members will have heard my ruling, and it remains unchanged.

Mr. Bennett: On a point of order, Mr. Morris.

The Chairman: Is this another point of order?

Mr. Bennett: Yes, it is. It is on the proceedings of the House.

I understand that amendments for Report stage cannot be tabled until the Committee has reported. That means, therefore, that Members have to have, in manuscript form,

[Mr. Bennett]

the amendments that they would like to table, to hand in as soon as you move from one Chair to another. At that point, it is necessary for the House to have some idea of what is going to happen. I should have thought that it would be helpful, in making the selection, for the occupant of the Chair to have some idea of what is going to happen. It would appear to be difficult for the occupant of the Chair, in moving from one Chair to the other to start the Report stage, to make the selection, as it were, on the hoof. Would you give us some guidance on how we can make sensible progress on this issue?

The Chairman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for showing such concern for the Chair. I confirm that what he said on procedure is entirely correct, but I learned long ago to cross bridges when they are in front of me, not in anticipation of them.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: On a point of order, Mr. Morris. To those of us sitting here, it rather looks as though the Opposition do not want to carry on with the Bill. I do not know whether they are inviting you to do something to stop the proceedings, but if they are, the country ought to know that the Opposition are opposing an extremely important Bill.

The Chairman: I wish to make it absolutely clear that the Chair is here to serve the House until such hour as the House chooses to cease its debate.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Chairman: Order all round. I have given some helpful rulings, I think, and fair points of order have been raised. I would rather get on with the Bill, but if there are new dimensions to discuss, I will accept further points of order. They had better be new ones.

Mr. Fabricant: On a point of order, Mr. Morris. I have scanned the Bill and I can see no definition of the word "pursuer". Could you enlighten the House whether pursuer—

The Chairman: Order. That is nothing to do with the Chair.

Mr. Straw: I crave your indulgence, Mr. Morris, on one more occasion. Further to that point of order, and in response to the point raised by the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence), may I make it clear that we have agreed, and we stick by the agreement, to co-operate with the Government in getting the Bill through? However, it is also for the Government to co-operate with the House in ensuring that the Bill gets through. The Committee has expressed its will this evening by 179 votes to 172 in respect of amendment No. 13. It is incumbent on Ministers on the Treasury Bench to facilitate progress on the Bill tomorrow.

Mr. Maclean: I have heard all the points of order. The Government will ensure that the Bill is dealt with as expeditiously as possible on the Floor of the House, but I will not be bounced by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) into making a pronouncement from the Dispatch Box now on the result of the vote that we just heard. I assure hon. Members that we shall make the Government's view plain to the House at the earliest opportunity, in accordance with the rules of the House and our customs and conventions, to give hon. Members the maximum time within our rules to consider the announcement that we shall make in due course.

The Chairman: Mr. Robert G. Hughes had the floor.

Mr. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Morris. My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), to whose intervention I was responding, had his points answered by the hon. Member for Blackburn. It is clear that this group of amendments, like others, is designed to delay the Bill or to weaken it. The message must go out clearly from the Committee that the Labour party, aided and abetted by the Liberals, wants to weaken the Bill and delay it for as long as possible. That is what they voted for tonight. They cannot escape from their actions.

Mr. George Howarth: On a point of order, Mr. Morris. Is it in order for an hon. Member, who was not even present during the events that he is describing, to accuse the Opposition of trying to delay the Bill? My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has made it clear that the Opposition remain willing to co-operate with the Government, as they have throughout, to bring the Bill on to the statute book. The Government's incompetence, not the Opposition, has got them into their present position.

Mr. Beith: On a point of order, Mr. Morris. The views expressed from the Government Benches suggest that we might not continue to make progress on the Bill tonight. Will you confirm that, in order to do so, it will be necessary for the Government to move the 10 o'clock motion in two minutes? Will you be careful to ensure that, if a Whip moves the 10 o'clock motion, you notice him? Otherwise, we will not be able to make further progress.

The Chairman: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that I will try to do my duty to the best of my ability. Not much gets by.

Mr. Hughes: Given the dual evidence of the amendments on the amendment paper and the outrageous protestations of Opposition Members, it is clear that they want to delay and weaken the Bill. I do not want to delay it any further, so I shall sit down.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: Mr. Morris, I left the Chamber for a moment to go to have something to eat. When I returned, I found the place in complete disorder—

The Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman clearly had a very good dinner.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: I do, of course, apologise, Mr. Morris. I did not mean that this place—over which you preside—was in disorder, but that the Opposition's entire approach to the Bill was in disorder. My attention has been drawn to a list of amendments, which seems to be absolutely preposterous. On the basis that they are

trying to improve the Bill, why on earth have the Opposition tabled an amendment to consider the victim's legitimate interests—

The Chairman: Order.

It being Ten o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *left the Chair to report progress and ask leave to sit again.*

Committee report progress; to sit again tomorrow.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

INSURANCE PREMIUM TAX

That the Insurance Premium Tax (Taxable Insurance Contracts) Order 1996 (S.I., 1996, No. 2955), dated 26th November 1996, a copy of which was laid before this House on 26th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): With permission, I shall put together the Questions on motions Nos. 3 to 5.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

FAMILY LAW

That the draft Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 2) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 25th November, be approved.

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Social Security (Child Maintenance Bonus) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 25th November, be approved.

MAGISTRATES' COURTS

That the draft Magistrates' Courts (Remands in Custody) (Amendment) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 20th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to the European Communities orders.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated legislation),

EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

That the draft European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (Europe Agreement establishing an Association between the European Communities and their Member States and the Republic of Lithuania) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 26th November, be approved.

That the draft European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (Europe Agreement establishing an Association between the European Communities and their Member States and the Republic of Latvia) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 26th November, be approved.

That the draft European Communities (Definition of Treaties) (Europe Agreement establishing an Association between the European Communities and their Member States and the Republic of Estonia) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 26th November, be approved—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Question agreed to.

SELECT COMMITTEES

Ordered,

That Standing Order No. 121A (Committee on Standards and Privileges) be amended by inserting at the end of line 50 the words:

'(6A) The committee, or any sub-committee, shall have power to refer to unreported evidence of former Committees of Privileges or of former Select Committees on Members' Interests and to any documents circulated to any such committee.'.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

Hillsborough Tragedy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Brandreth.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): It is with a very heavy heart that I speak in this Adjournment debate. I am grateful, however, that my hon. Friends and Conservative Members are in the Chamber. Families of the bereaved of Hillsborough have travelled down to London and are in the Strangers Gallery to provide their support during the debate. I particularly note that the Home Secretary has chosen to reply to this debate, because I think that he realises the significance and sensitivity of the issue.

On 15 April 1989, on a glorious spring afternoon, 96 people went to a football match never to return again to their families. They were men and women of all ages—from 10 to 67—and 28 of them were 18 years old or less. They came from all parts of the country, although mainly from Merseyside, and all of them had one thing in common—a love of football, particularly of Liverpool football club.

It would serve no useful purpose to repeat all the events of that day, or to attempt to rehearse the many legal arguments that have been made in the intervening seven and a half years, but it is important to establish, in general terms, what happened on that fateful day.

Although the Liverpool supporters outnumbered the opposing team's supporters, they were allocated tickets for the smaller Leppings lane end. The allocation was made on the direction of the police, to facilitate their plans for incoming traffic carrying rival supporters. Roadworks on the trans-Pennine route slowed down the traffic carrying Liverpool fans. As they approached the ground, it was noted that match day arrangements had been changed from those for a similar game in the previous season.

It has been pointed out that the standard practice at Sheffield and elsewhere was for police to channel supporters to the appropriate turnstiles by using crash barriers. Tragically, such action was not taken on that day, and it set in motion a train of events that led to the tragedy.

The crowd built up outside the turnstiles in such a way that the police officer in charge there, Superintendent Murray, was concerned that fans were in grave danger of being crushed. He sought, and was given, permission from the officer in overall charge, Chief Superintendent Duckenfield, to open gate C to alleviate the crush outside. That resolved the immediate crisis, but gave rise to a much greater danger because the natural path for the fans to follow, unless directed otherwise, was through the tunnel facing them. There were no stewards or police to funnel fans into comparatively empty pens. Pressure built up in pens 3 and 4 and in the tunnel. These were the killing fields for 96 innocent men, women and children.

In the immediate aftermath of the horror, there was a breakdown in official reaction to the tragedy, which unfolded live on television around the country. It was the fans who pleaded for the gates in the perimeter fence to be opened; it was the fans who requisitioned hoardings as makeshift stretchers; it was the fans who began mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Individual police officers and first aiders did what they could, but there was paralysis at the top of the command.

As the Attorney-General observed in the House on 26 October 1994:

> "It was a painstaking and thorough inquiry. . . . The Taylor report placed the blame for the tragedy fairly and squarely on police handling of crowd control at the event."—[*Official Report*, 24 October 1994; Vol. 248, c. 981.]

Lord Justice Taylor noted in paragraphs 311 and 278 of his interim report that

> "the real cause of the Hillsborough disaster was overcrowding"

and that

> "the main reason for the disaster was the failure of police control."

There was an agreed understanding in the Taylor report and beyond on what happened and who, in general, was responsible, but the inquiry did not take place in a vacuum. As the tragedy unfolded, misinformation was being spread. We were told that fans had broken down gate C, that hordes of drunken fans charged the rear of the Leppings lane entrance, and that the Liverpool fans had been the authors of the terrible misfortune of the day. Those who uttered such charges and wrote such lies should still hang their heads in shame, given the eventual findings of the Taylor inquiry.

The low point must have been the infamous report of that terrible day in *The Sun*. Even by its Grub street standards it reached an abysmal low, but it was not alone. Newspaper after newspaper, tabloid and broadsheet, fed the line that fans were responsible for the deaths. The world is full of gullible people. Perhaps that is why, as late as 1993, the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) was still peddling the line that it was all the fault of Liverpool fans. As late as 1995, Mr. Brian Clough continued to point the finger at the fans in his autobiography. There is no fool like an old fool, in politics or in football.

At the same time, a steady stream of wholly partial versions of events emanated from police sources, blaming the fans and fuelling a climate of cynical disregard for the facts, dwelling instead on the exoneration of those who some might argue were culpable for the events of that day.

We are here tonight because of a recent docudrama on Hillsborough which demythologised the Hillsborough tragedy and provided catharsis for the survivors and the families of the dead. It was plain to anyone who saw that harrowing account—I note that the Home Secretary has commented that it was a harrowing account—that there was a presumption by the authorities that drunken loutish behaviour was responsible for the deaths. That was illustrated by the tone and content of the police questioning in the docudrama. I do not accuse individual junior police officers of acting unprofessionally; they were following a line set out for them by senior officers and the press.

If showing that a wholly erroneous version of events had been portrayed by the press had been the only achievement of the docudrama, it would have been worth while, but it also raised the issue of the allegedly faulty video camera and the missing video tape. In my research, I noticed that, in questions to the Home Secretary in the House following his statement of

17 April 1989, my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) urged that all film of the tragedy be made available to the proposed inquiry. He presciently said:

"Unless we move quickly, that footage may be lost and it contains evidence that may be of great value to the inquiry."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 1989; Vol. 151, c. 38.]

How right he was.

We now have the testimony of Mr. Roger Houldsworth—a video technician on duty at Hillsborough on that fateful day—who apparently contradicts the police version of the state of the video cameras. He had the same view as the police of the build-up of fans in the pens. His analysis of the impending disaster is as at odds with the view of the police.

Of course, the police take contradictory positions on Mr. Houldsworth's testimony. First, they say that there is no new evidence in it, yet it was not put before the inquiry or the inquest. Only the police version of the video evidence was put to the inquest jury. Apparently, the South Yorkshire police, the coroner, and the investigating force—the West Midlands police—have hitherto declined to co-operate in determining how much of Mr. Houldsworth's evidence was known and to whom. Nor has there been, as far as I am aware, any attempt to clarify how, and by whom, it was decided not to call him. Some would describe that as a conspiracy of silence.

However, the *Yorkshire Post* has ascribed to the police the view that Mr. Houldsworth has changed what he said at the time, which contradicts the "nothing new" argument. The police cannot have it both ways. Without doubt there are serious grounds either way for reviewing that vital evidence. That must be added to the other outstanding questions that have never yet been answered.

The South Yorkshire police, in particular, must still answer the following questions. Why was Chief Superintendent Duckenfield put in charge of a major semi-final only 21 days before the game, when he was relatively inexperienced at policing football matches? Why, unlike in 1988, were there no barriers or cordons to filter the crowd outside the Leppings lane end? As the danger unfolded, why was the kick-off not delayed? Why did police not recognise the build-up in pens 3 and 4 when television commentator John Motson and the video technician, Roger Houldsworth, clearly saw what was happening?

Why was the lethal tunnel not sealed off as it had been in 1988? Why did Chief Superintendent Duckenfield tell the Football Association that fans had forced gate C when he had ordered it to be opened? Why did it take until 3.30 pm to make an announcement on the public address system to inform or instruct fans or to seek medical personnel to help the dying and the injured? Given that 42 ambulances reached the ground, why did not more of them get on to the pitch to provide expert medical help? Why did only 14 of those who died get to hospital? Why was the city's major medical disaster plan never put into effect?

Those and many more questions need to be answered. The House cannot raise the dead, but I hope that we can raise the burden on the survivors and on the families of the victims, who wish only to see that justice is done. The dead, their families and survivors cry out in the name of natural justice to be answered. It is incumbent on us to seek a reopening of the inquiry into the events of that dreadful day.

10.12 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Howard): I would like to join the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) in expressing my deepest sympathy to the families involved in the tragic event which took place at Hillsborough. I know that I speak for the whole House when I say that our thoughts will remain with them this Christmas, which I know that they must find a particularly difficult time of year.

Anybody who saw the news reports on that dreadful Saturday, 15 April 1989, will have been overwhelmed by the terrible, distressing pictures. I know that the loss of the families that suffered that appalling tragedy was made all the worse by the fact that it arose from an event that should have been a normal family outing.

I have watched the programme "Hillsborough" and I indeed found it harrowing, but the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that any decisions that I am called upon to make have to be made on the basis of a consideration of all the relevant facts, not simply on the basis of one television programme, however powerful and moving. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there have been four independent investigations and reviews of the Hillsborough tragedy: Lord Taylor's inquiry; the inquest into each of the deaths; the investigation into police behaviour supervised by the Police Complaints Authority; and the judicial review of the inquest. Each of those inquiries served a different purpose, and it might be helpful if I said a little about each of them and their outcomes.

First, the formal inquiry by Lord Taylor was commissioned by the then Home Secretary on the second day after the disaster. Its terms of reference were not only to inquire into the events but to make recommendations about crowd control and safety at sports events. Over 31 days, between 15 May and 29 June 1989, Lord Taylor heard oral evidence from 174 witnesses at a public hearing in Sheffield. He also received evidence in the form of submissions and letters. The inquiry considered video film from three separate sources, providing in all about 71 hours of further evidence.

Lord Taylor published an interim report in August 1989, setting out the causes of the disaster and making immediate recommendations. He found that there were a number of causes of that disaster. The immediate cause of the gross overcrowding was the failure to cut off access to the central pens, which were already over-full. They were already over-full because no safe maximum capacities had been laid down, because no attempt was made to control entry to individual pens numerically, and because there was no effective visual monitoring of crowd density.

Lord Taylor found that, when the influx from gate C entered pen 3, the layout of the barriers afforded less protection than it should have done, and the barrier collapsed. He found that the need to open gate C was due to dangerous congestion at the turnstiles. That congestion occurred because, as both the club and the police should have realised, the turnstile area could not easily cope with the large numbers unless they arrived steadily over a

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lengthy period. The police had failed to draw up plans on how to control large numbers should they arrive in a short period. Unfortunately, that event, which Lord Taylor considered to be foreseeable, was what took place.

Finally, Lord Taylor found that the presence of an unruly minority, who had drunk too much, aggravated the problem, as did the club's confused and inadequate signs and ticketing. There were a number of reasons for that dreadful disaster, and no single person or organisation was held to blame, but Lord Taylor did clearly put a significant portion of the blame at the door of the police. Indeed, he was particularly critical of the attitude of South Yorkshire police to the disaster.

Lord Taylor said:

"It is a matter of regret that at the hearing and in their submissions the South Yorkshire Police were not prepared to concede that they were in any respect at fault in what occurred. Mr. Duckenfield, under pressure of cross-examination, apologised for blaming the Liverpool fans for causing the deaths. But that apart, the police case was to blame the fans for being late and drunk and to blame the club for failing to monitor the pens. It was argued that the fatal crush was not caused by the influx through gate C but was due to barrier 124a being defective. Such an unrealistic approach gives cause for anxiety as to whether lessons have been learnt. It would have been more seemly and encouraging for the future if responsibility had been faced."

Lord Taylor also considered the reports that had been published in the press about the behaviour of Liverpool fans. Again I quote from his report:

"Before this Inquiry began there were stories reported in the press, and said to have emanated from police officers present at the match, of 'mass drunkenness'. It was said that drunken fans urinated on police whilst they were pulling the dead and injured out, that others had even urinated on the bodies of the dead and stolen their belongings. Not a single witness was called before the inquiry to support any of those allegations, although every opportunity was afforded for any of the represented parties to have any witness called whom they wished. As soon as the allegations I have mentioned were made in the press, Mr. Peter Wright, Chief Constable of South Yorkshire, made a dignified statement dissociating himself from such grave and emotive calumnies. Those who made them and those who disseminated them would have done better to hold their peace."

That is strong criticism. I think that those quotations demonstrate that many of the points made by the programme, "Hillsborough", were considered by Lord Taylor at the time.

I should stress that, since the report, the police have accepted responsibility for the part that they played in the disaster. The present chief constable of South Yorkshire, Richard Wells, has on several occasions publicly expressed his deep sorrow at the deaths. More recently, on the "Today" programme, he said that the police saw their responsibility in three particular areas. He admitted that, once the gates were open, the police should have foreseen where the fans would go; he accepted that they might have reduced some of the pressure by changing the kick-off time; and he also accepted that officers did not recognise soon enough the distinction between disorder and distress. The South Yorkshire police have accepted that they were at fault in those respects and the South Yorkshire police authority has paid compensation to the families of those who died.

The second investigation into events was an inquest conducted by Her Majesty's coroner for the western district of South Yorkshire. That was a difficult task, partly because of the number of deaths and partly because the Taylor inquiry was still in progress. The coroner conducted an inquiry into the deaths and sat for a total of 96 days. It is important that I remind the House of the purpose of an inquest.

An inquest is a fact-finding inquiry conducted to establish reliable answers to four important but limited factual questions. They are the identity of the deceased, the place of death, the time—if known—and the date of death, and how the deceased came by his or her death. That is all an inquest can consider. Rule 36 of the coroners' rules of 1984 requires that proceedings and evidence are directed solely at finding answers to those questions and forbids any expression of opinion on other matters.

The jury examining the evidence found that the cause of death was accidental death, but the findings of an inquest do not bind any person affected by them. The inquest's conclusion, indeed, must not be framed in such a way as to determine any question of criminal responsibility on the part of any named person or any question of civil liability. A finding of accidental death does not prevent further proceedings.

The third investigation into the disaster was conducted by West Midlands police, supervised by the independent Police Complaints Authority, with a view to establishing whether the tragedy resulted from, or was made worse by, criminal activity on the part of any individual. It also considered whether any officer should be subject to disciplinary proceedings.

The investigation involved the taking of 5,341 statements, as well as scrutiny of all the material that had previously been examined. The evidence was sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions, who concluded that the result did not indicate that anyone should be made the subject of criminal proceedings. That has meant that neither Chief Superintendent Duckenfield nor Superintendent Murray, who were both criticised by the Taylor inquiry—nor for that matter any other person—has been charged with any crime. For any other person apart from a police officer, that would have been the end of the proceedings, but for a police officer there remained the question of whether they had failed in their duty.

The Police Complaints Authority decided that Chief Superintendent Duckenfield and Superintendent Murray should face disciplinary charges. Police disciplinary hearings are held in private. They are concerned only with whether an officer may have failed to conform to police discipline; they do not consider wider issues.

In the event, Mr. Duckenfield retired due to ill health in advance of a disciplinary tribunal's ruling on whether he was guilty. It is sometimes forgotten that, although a number of punishments can be imposed for bad discipline, the most serious that a disciplinary tribunal can impose is that of dismissal or of a requirement to resign. In the event, Mr. Duckenfield stopped being a police officer and the disciplinary hearing could not continue, because such hearings can be held only on police officers.

The Police Complaints Authority announced subsequently that disciplinary proceedings against Superintendent Murray would be withdrawn. When explaining its decision, the authority stated that the retirement of the chief superintendent, Mr. Duckenfield, on medical grounds, meant that what in effect was a joint

allegation of neglect of duty could not be fairly heard in the absence of the more senior officer. However, some time later, Superintendent Murray decided that he did not wish to remain as a police officer either.

It is of course well known that there was dissatisfaction with the verdict of the inquest. The law provides a remedy for that by way of judicial review. The fourth examination, therefore, was the judicial review of the coroner's proceedings.

Relatives of a number of the victims applied for judicial review. In those proceedings, the conduct of the South Yorkshire coroner's inquest was subjected to a close and detailed examination. In giving the judgment of the divisional court, Lord Justice McCowan ruled very clearly that none of the points raised justified the intervention of that court. In particular, the court found that the decision of the coroner to exclude evidence of what happened after 3.15 pm on that afternoon was not an unreasonable decision. It also made no criticism of the coroner's directions to the jury.

Clearly, it is not possible for me to know the truth of what happened on that terrible Saturday. What is important is that we should be satisfied that those dreadful events seven years ago have been fully investigated and examined. The hon. Member for Walton calls for a reopening of the public inquiry. I have had a number of letters making a similar request from those who were bereaved, and I have met at least two of them.

I have said that I will consider those representations. I must emphasise the fact that I would not take a decision to reopen the inquiry lightly: I must be convinced that it would be in the public interest to do so.

The charge has been made—it is one that I will consider carefully—that there has been a cover-up, an attempt to pervert the course of justice. I shall also consider whether there is any new evidence, and if so, whether that evidence is of such significance that had it been put before Lord Taylor or before the coroner, either the outcome of the Taylor inquiry or the verdict of the jury would have been different.

As I consider those questions, I shall be searching for the truth about what happened. It has been said that there was a video camera trained on the central enclosure, and that the Taylor inquiry was told that it was not working, although that was not the case. But I have been informed by the chief constable of South Yorkshire that both the videotape and a transcript of that tape were made available to the Taylor inquiry. Clearly, that is a matter that I will need to look into.

I fully sympathise with the families who feel that in some way they have not learnt the whole truth about the deaths of their loved ones. Certainly in an appalling tragedy such as Hillsborough it is perhaps inevitable, though deeply distressing for the families, that there will be confusion about some details.

I shall reach a decision on any further action to be taken as soon as I have been able to consider all those issues. I shall certainly take into account everything that the hon. Gentleman has said tonight. Whatever my decision, I shall always be deeply moved by the memory of that awful event at Hillsborough on 15 April 1989.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 18 December 1996

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Pairing Arrangements

9.34 am

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Although you are concerned with the reputation of the House, you are obviously not responsible in any way, any more than your predecessors were, for pairing arrangements. Would you, however, consider it part of your duty to say that the way in which parties organise themselves, and make arrangements accordingly, reflects on the House's reputation?

It is now quite clear that the Government party cheated outright on Monday by pairing the same names with both the main Opposition party and the Liberal Democrat party, which is certainly unsatisfactory. It is deplorable that such cheating occurred. I hope that, since the Government are a minority Administration, they will behave somewhat differently in the new year.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must not attempt to put words into my mouth. As he and the entire House know, the arrangements that political parties come to in this House are not at all the business of the Speaker.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a further point of order, Madam Speaker. As you know, on this the last day before the Christmas recess, the Government sometimes make a statement. Have you had any indication, either through the usual business channels or whatever, that the Government will make a statement on pairing arrangements?

My point of order is a little different from that of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) since I do not believe in the pairing system. I regard it as organised truancy. Frankly, I am pleased that the rest of my colleagues have been relieved from the pairing nonsense. I hope that, from now on, to the day of this Tory Government's demise, there will be no pairing. When we get into power, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) becomes Prime Minister and puts up the pink curtains in No. 10 Downing street, I hope that there will be no pairing, and we will drive through our legislation—new and old Labour.

Madam Speaker: I wonder whether that was really a point of order or just an expression of opinion. I think that the hon. Gentleman asked whether a statement would be made. He will have to wait and see.

Adjournment (Christmas)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Conway.]*

9.36 am

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): Before we go into the Christmas recess, I should like to raise some points about the economy and my constituency. Like many of our coastal communities and their rural hinterlands, Waveney's unemployment and some infrastructural obstacles remain stubbornly high. In Waveney, there is not the same relative prosperity, per capita income or inward investment that there is in most of East Anglia.

I have taken the view ever since I was elected that I should make a judgment on each issue before the House in the light of how my constituents will be affected. I am one of the happy minority of Members who represents the area where he was born and brought up. When I have decided not to support the Government—on Europe, fisheries, or health matters, for instance—I have done so with the best intentions of serving my constituents.

Many years ago, I first became convinced as a teenager of the Conservative philosophy of freedom of choice, free enterprise, freedom to spend more of one's own money and freedom from state control. Through my childhood I watched my parents working day and night to establish a small business in a shop over which we lived. I was in the sixth form during the 1964 general election campaign, when I saw two prominent Labour party Front Benchers, Fred Peart and George Brown, swan in and treat Lowestoft to a display of hypocrisy, contempt and arrogance that sickened me.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): They still won the election.

Mr. Porter: Indeed they did, but that was old Labour. Since then, it has repackaged its image. The Conservative party has repackaged its image too, to some extent—freedom of choice has become an opportunity for all. That same basic gut feeling about offering opportunity made it possible for me, from an ordinary background, to become a Conservative Member of Parliament and speak for Waveney, as I am doing quite unashamedly in this speech.

We live in a world in which we have to accept regulation and control, where freedom exists under the law, and where responsibilities run alongside freedom of choice. It is a fact of life that sometimes the market needs stimulating, realigning and fine-tuning in the public interest, just as privatised industries need regulators.

I say all that by way of preamble, because I wish to praise the Government for listening to some of the representations that I and others, of all parties and none, have made about the need to inject public money in a structured and targeted way into parts of my constituency.

We have missed out on assisted area status each time so far. Great Yarmouth, up the road, has it, and there is no doubt that that fact has the potential to suck many jobs out of Waveney and into Great Yarmouth. However, we have objective 5b status, and from that some money is beginning to flow into a variety of projects.

This week we have had not merely an injection but a transfusion of money and targeted support. The Kirkley regeneration initiative, Lowestoft, has been successful

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under round 3 of the single regeneration budget challenge fund. That is a seven-year scheme in an area rated as the second most deprived in Suffolk, which suffers from high unemployment and from social, environmental and crime problems. Incidentally, both Benjamin Britten and I were born there.

The scheme aims to support business and to introduce crime prevention measures, infrastructure improvements, health measures, drug and alcohol counselling, training for the unemployed, housing improvements and an expansion of tourism. The council failed last year with a bid for industry-led regeneration, and it has built on advice from the Government office for the eastern region—an excellent support body.

Over the full seven years, the scheme should receive £4.2 million in support from the challenge fund. That money, complemented by nearly £22 million of private sector funding and other public money, should create 100 jobs, support 75 business start-ups, fund 50,000 weeks of training, help 875 people obtain qualifications and 125 people obtain jobs, provide 10,000 sq m of new business and commercial floor space, and improve or build 400 homes.

Kirkley, which is in south Lowestoft, is an area of enormous potential, with the best beach in Britain. The news is good, by any standards. As required under the rules of the challenge, Waveney district council led the bid. What puzzles me is why the controlling Labour party on the council should be happy that the Government have accepted that deserving case, yet still threatens to do away with such competitive bidding. I do not understand why Labour wants to stop ensuring that public money goes where it will be well spent and is most needed. That is new Labour with its old roots showing.

In the rest of the county, Suffolk Prosper, another seven-year project, is to receive more than £750,000, yet still Labour would remove that targeted money and the competitive edge. Labour wants to stop keeping local authorities on their toes in that way.

We are also to receive almost £3.2 million for the final 1-km phase of the Lowestoft northern spine road, which will promote economic development and alleviate traffic problems, and which includes the provision of a major cycle track. In addition, under the local transport capital expenditure we shall receive £150,000 for a package to assist public transport, make pedestrian route improvements and encourage more cycling.

There are still major problems caused by the axing of the trunk roads programme before the A12 had been properly dualled from London to Great Yarmouth. The third crossing at Lowestoft is the one project that would best link all the other schemes and plans, all the hopes and aspirations of businesses and individuals. I have not given up on that, and I shall see my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads about it yet again next month.

We still need success under the challenge for help with funding for closed-circuit television cameras in Kirkley and south Lowestoft, as well as in central Lowestoft, to complete the major drive in which Waveney is fighting for Waveney. However, what we already have is significant, at a time when public resources are in such demand.

The Norfolk and Waveney training and enterprise council, the chamber of commerce and industry, and business link will all merge in April. The Lowestoft 2000 consortium of local business is marketing Lowestoft aggressively and effectively. Yes, things have been hard, but the horizon is bright, provided that we do not throw it all away.

The Futura project, and the "Caring for Education" initiative, both of which I have mentioned in the House recently, are new ideas—innovative exciting projects that will harness the best in local people, enterprise, and both public and private finance. Next year, East Anglia will have the east of England investment agency, which will serve Lowestoft and the other parts of my constituency, including the towns of Beccles, Bungay, Southwold and Halesworth. Truly the future is bright—the future is blue.

Of course it could be argued that all that money in grants, especially the European Union money, would not be necessary if the country were not paying a subscription to the EU. Our subscription could stay in the United Kingdom to fund the regeneration, the inward investment and the attraction of tourists, and to give business even lower taxes. But I shall not develop that argument now.

I shall finish on a truth that is a lesson for us all, including my right hon. and hon. Friends in government. A Government who respond positively to communities that are determined to succeed for themselves are an effective Government, a Government who truly extend opportunities for all.

9.44 am

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Before the House rises for the recess, one or two matters should be raised. We all know that an election should have been held before now. The Government cling on desperately, hoping against hope that something will turn up to reverse the tide of public opinion that is flowing against them.

It would be far better for our democracy and for the political health of the country if the election had taken place in the autumn. Then the electorate would have decided accordingly. For a Government who have been in office for more than 17 years to hang on as a minority Administration is not in the interests of this country, and clearly we can expect the Government to remain determined to cling on until almost the last moment, to see whether they can stay in office.

Ministers seem to be adopting today's equivalent of the 17th-century monarch's divine right to rule. To them it seems almost an impertinence that there could be a different Government in this country. However, democracy depends on changes in Government and in the political parties that form Administrations; it does not mean one party being in power all the time. I believe that there is undoubtedly a wish for change in the country—we shall see whether I am right when the time comes—and that by clinging to office the Government are doing themselves no good.

If I may refer to the point of order that I raised earlier—without involving you in any way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and taking full responsibility for my own words—I shall add that in my view an apology is required from Ministers for what occurred on Monday.

If that does not happen, I hope that the policy announced by the Opposition Chief Whip will come into operation in the new year, and pairing arrangements will

come to an end. If the Government feel otherwise, it would be appropriate for the Leader of the House to make a statement on behalf of the Government Chief Whip before we rise for the recess today. That is the least that we expect from the Government.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Winnick: Not with any enthusiasm, but I suppose so, if the hon. Gentleman wishes.

Mr. Arnold: I am flattered indeed. Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House whether he was a Member of Parliament in the late 1970s, when the Labour Government that he supported were in a considerable minority? Would he care to justify what went on then and tell the House about the skulduggery in the Labour Whips Office, and thereby show an interesting modesty?

Mr. Winnick: One thing is certain: at all times we have acted with dignity. *[Interruption.]* I see that the Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household, the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway)—the Government Whip who is, rightly or wrongly, being held responsible for Monday's cheating—is having a laugh.

I remember one incident from the late 1970s that has not been and is not likely to be repeated. That was when the present Deputy Prime Minister, who was then a prominent figure on the Opposition Front Bench, picked up the Mace and started brandishing it. No wonder he acquired the nickname "Tarzan".

I was not present at the time—I was between parliamentary seats—but many of my hon. Friends were, and they witnessed that incident. So we do not require any lectures, least of all from the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), who will be extremely fortunate if he manages to hold on to his seat at the election. I imagine that he will be one of the casualties.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Deputy Prime Minister was not suspended when he did that, either.

Mr. Winnick: No, he was not—unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover, who has been suspended once or twice.

I want now to draw attention to what life will be like for many of our fellow citizens this Christmas. This should be a festive season and people should have the financial means to have a reasonably happy Christmas and new year but far too many people live in poverty or near-poverty. The proportion of people living in poverty has more than trebled since 1979, from one in 14 to one in four. The number of children living in poverty has soared from one in 10 to one in three. The number of people dependent on means-tested benefits has doubled, from one in 12 to one in six. On income, the bottom tenth of the population is 17 per cent. worse off in absolute terms, while the top tenth is almost two thirds better off. That has happened during the past 17 years.

Some might say that the figures were produced by the Labour party, but they are based on parliamentary replies from Government Departments. When the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which is certainly non-party, published its report on income and wealth in February 1995, it concluded that the divide between rich and poor was deepening. It recommended a far-reaching programme to stop what it described as the damaging consequences of that divide.

It is unfortunate that so many of the things that we hoped had gone for ever, such as mass unemployment, poverty, large numbers of people on means-tested benefits, the many pensioners who live on the smallest possible income and who find it almost impossible—perhaps the word "almost" is unnecessary—to make ends meet from day to day, have come back to our country. That is why, on the eve of Christmas 1996, after nearly 18 years of Tory government, we should be deeply concerned about what has happened to our country.

I do not suggest that post-war Governments, including Conservative ones, had no social problems or that people did not live on small incomes. Things were far from perfect after the second world war, but we all hoped, in the 30 years or so after the war, that the worst sort of poverty and poverty-related illnesses had been removed from our country for good, that at least we had made that much progress since the 1920s and 1930s. We hoped that the social changes had not only been made but consolidated to form a permanent part of British society. It is an unfortunate curse that in 1996 so many of our fellow citizens, through no fault of their own, should live on incomes on which they cannot manage.

The statistics that I have cited show what sort of country Britain has again become. We have gone back to the past in ways that I and my hon. Friends hoped would never again return to our shores. The Opposition look forward to a change of Government and policy, to an honest Government that will be concerned with all our people, not one tiny section.

We can only conclude that this Christmas will be sad in many respects for the people that I have described who live on the barest possible income and who do not have anywhere near enough to live on. They include pensioners, many of whom served in the last war. They sometimes ask me, "Who won the war?", and we know exactly what they mean. Anyone who disputes that, disputes what is actually happening up and down the country. I only hope that we can change policies so that we can give hope to them that they will have enough to live on and will not have to live in circumstances that are disgraceful in an advanced industrial country such as Britain.

9.54 am

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): We should not adjourn for Christmas without carefully considering several concerns of importance to my constituents. I wish to raise four issues: first, the success of the Government's private finance initiative and the opportunities that it creates for north-west Kent finally to gain our new district general hospital at Darenth Park; secondly, a matter that concerns my Sikh constituents, the state of human rights in their homeland, the Punjab; thirdly, the Kent Thames-side bid for the British academy of sports; fourthly, the south Thames-side development route phase 4, which is vital for the developments at Ebbsfleet in my constituency and to the peace and well-being of the people of Northfleet.

My constituents, and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), rely on three ancient hospitals: Joyce Green, West Hill and Gravesend and

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

North Kent. We have been in the queue for 25 years for a brand new district general hospital, which would cost some £100 million. Each time that our local NHS has built up the project, the powers that be—under Governments of both parties—have considered it, gone white at the size of the price tag, and asked us to revise the project and find whether we could do it in phases. If we did it in phases, we would be trapped on the highly unsuitable Joyce Green site, north of Dartford.

That was the old NHS system: queuing up for the annual dole of capital funding—a system to which the Labour party would like to return. That is why I welcome the fresh thinking that the Government have applied through the PFI. Surely out there in the market, there are consortia that would like to bid to provide new district general hospitals, with the magnificent construction work that they involve; to provide estate management and management of the buildings, catering, cleaning and maintenance—everything that is required. That would be provided at a cost to the NHS, which would provide the doctors, nurses, medical administration and all that goes into making the NHS something of which people are proud.

In north-west Kent, we had five bidders to build, manage and run our district general hospital. Earlier this year, the Pentlands Healthcare group became the front runner to provide the hospital. It has provided a magnificent hospital on paper, which my constituents are looking at. It is not only excellent for the current population; it has immense scope for expansion as the Thames gateway developments bring thousands more residents into north-west Kent.

The PFI is wonderful for large capital projects, but it is hideously complex. Imagine the contracts running over 25 years, the disposal of current land holdings and all that that involves. That complexity needs the attention of Ministers to ensure that projects come through. I pay tribute to my hon. Friends in the Department of Health, the Treasury and the Department of the Environment for their positive interest and hard work in ensuring that this project will take place.

The Darenth Park hospital offers a magnificent opportunity for my constituents, so, in the spirit of Christmas, I would like to thank my hon. Friends the Ministers for what they have done. I would also like to ask them to keep up the pressure in the new year so that we can see bulldozers on that site soon constructing our new district general hospital—a hospital that has been possible only because of the Conservatives' PFI policy.

I should like to raise the subject of human rights in Punjab, as the chairman of the Punjab human rights sub-committee of the all-party human rights group in the House and also because it is my duty to express the concerns of the Sikh community of Gravesend and Northfleet in my constituency. That community has its roots in the province of Punjab.

Hon. Members will recall that, until 1947, the House was responsible for the affairs of India. When we departed from India, the then Viceroy, Viscount Mountbatten of Burma, negotiated the settlement for withdrawal jointly with the successor authorities of Mr. Nehru and the Congress party. He did so in the clear knowledge that Nehru and the Congress party had given undertakings to the Sikh leaders, particularly those in the province of Punjab. Subsequent to those negotiations and independence, the Sikh community was betrayed over the assurances that it had been given. The sour atmosphere generated then led to the tensions and misery that finally led to the desecration of the golden temple at Amritsar.

The past few years have been highlighted by continuing incidents of police brutality in Punjab, which has been responded to by zealots, who range from those whose objective is civil rights in Punjab to those who have had enough and are calling for an independent state of Khalistan.

In common with all disputes of that kind, the victims are invariably ordinary people, in this case the villagers throughout the rural areas of the province of Punjab. In recent months there have been signs of improvement, but great concern is still being expressed about abductions and disappearances. I would like to draw the House's attention to two particular examples.

The first is that of Jaswant Singh Khalra, the general secretary of the human rights wing of the Akali Dal party, a Sikh political party. He has not been seen since September 1995, when he was abducted by the police. The police have since refused to reveal Mr. Khalra's whereabouts, and he has not been brought before a magistrate or charged with an offence. It is precisely that type of disappearance, of which there are many precedents in history, that causes so much concern. The second example is that of Mr. Harjit Singh, a 34-year-old, who, last year, was picked up by 10 plain-clothes policemen in Punjab. He was abducted and subsequently brutalised.

Those examples are just two from a wide variety of cases. I believe that the House should make it clear to the Indian authorities that we expect the Indian Government to comply with their obligations to protect human rights under the international covenant on civil and political rights. They should ensure that all allegations of torture, extra-judicial execution, custodial death, custodial rape and disappearance are fully investigated by an impartial and independent body. It is high time that India, which is deemed to be a country of the future, cleared up its own back yard and saw that human rights were protected.

My constituency is part of the Thames gateway. For many decades, north-west Kent has depended on heavy industry for its future. In the past 20 years, those heavy industries have mostly disappeared, although those connected with paper and cement still remain, but they rely on high technology and a highly skilled but far smaller work force than used to be the case. That is why we welcomed so much the enthusiasm with which my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister launched the Thames gateway scheme and the vision with which that has been carried forward by the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration. The aura of the projects that the Government are encouraging offers great hope for the future. Those opportunities are already being realised, which explains the rapid fall in unemployment in Gravesham in particular.

The decision taken some years ago by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to re-route the channel tunnel rail link obviously raised considerable environmental concerns in north-west Kent, with which we are still struggling. It also brought one overwhelming benefit, however, with the Government's decision to locate the international station at Ebbsfleet in north-west Kent. That has provided immense opportunities for new development. In fact, it has been estimated that, in time, 30,000 new jobs will be created. Transport links will also improve to the extent that my constituents, who currently suffer a 50-minute commute to London, will be able to travel from the Ebbsfleet domestic station to the capital in just 19 minutes. The development also means that a series of new roads will be built in north-west Kent, not least to the new district general hospital.

Much needs to be done. That is why I should particularly like to draw attention to the bid from Kent Thames-Side Grouping for the British Academy of Sport to be located in north-west Kent. In the past few days, the Department of National Heritage and the Sports Council have shortlisted the many bids received to 12. The bid from the Kent Thames-Side is particularly fascinating because the academy might be located on the Swanscombe peninsula on the River Thames. It would be close to Ebbsfleet international station. We have thousands of acres that could be developed for sport and consortium of interested local authorities, companies and the like, which have put together the magnificent bid.

The north-west Kent location is close to London and it has a unique advantage because, were the academy to be based at Ebbsfleet, which borders my constituency, it would supplement magnificently the sporting facilities of the capital, and enhance its bid to stage the 2004 Olympics. I hope that my right hon. Friends will pay close attention to the bid from Kent Thames-Side, which would so enhance sporting opportunities for local people in my constituency as well as the bid from London to stage the 2004 Olympics.

Considerable concern has been expressed about the access routes in north-west Kent because of the construction of the high-speed rail link and the associated major civil engineering projects, which are due to start within the next few months as a result of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill, which recently passed through all its stages in the House.

The principal projects will be the tunnel underneath the River Thames from the Swanscombe peninsula on one side of Northfleet, and the construction of the Ebbsfleet international station on the other side of Northfleet. It does not take much imagination to envisage the heavy goods vehicles that will roll through the town between the two major construction sites, because currently there is no alternative to passing through the centre of the old town. For that reason, I and many of my constituents have campaigned for an effective Northfleet town bypass, known in the bureaucratic world as the south Thames-side development route, phase 4.

Many hon. Members know all about backing bids for town bypasses—there must be thousands of such projects throughout the country and dozens of them in Kent alone. What has made the difference to my Northfleet constituents is the channel tunnel rail link and the two major civil engineering projects to which I have referred. Without the bypass, the lives of my constituents will increasingly become a nightmare. It was for those reasons that the project was worked up, but I have to draw the House's attention to the crass incompetence of Kent county council in its handling of the project.

Almost two years ago, my constituents attended a public exhibition at St. Botolph's school, Northfleet, to see the details of the bypass project. The council's meandering slowness since then means that there are no signs that we shall have the bypass before construction starts on the two big civil engineering projects. In those two years, the council has meandered through designing the project; its department of highways has applied to the department of planning for permission to build the bypass; and it has considered how to accumulate the land and involved itself in a hideously complex and delayed process of land swaps between the Labour-controlled borough council and the Lib-Lab-controlled county council.

After two years, we find that the council has landed itself in such disputes over land that the whole matter has had to be referred to the Department of Transport for a public inquiry. I do not know how long that inquiry will take, and I hope that Ministers at the Department of Transport will do all they can to speed up that process, which has so far been handled with outrageous incompetence.

Nearly four years ago, I was distressed by Kent county council passing out of Conservative councillors' hands into the control of a coalition of Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors. My only consolation was that several of the leaders of Kent county council's Labour group sat for Gravesham county divisions. I thought that they would at least give our town priority and get the bypass project through. Not a bit of it. Two years ago, the Government made it plain that they would accept two new highway projects in Kent, so those clever county councillors put the bypass in third position on their list. One year ago, the Government said they would accept one new project in Kent, so the councillors put the bypass in second position. The result was that the project failed, two years in a row.

I was delighted when my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of Transport gave £1.5 million of special credit approval to get the project going. The Government clearly perceived the need for the bypass, and my constituents were grateful for the Government's interest in the matter. My constituents are now appalled that, because Kent county council has got itself into such a mess, that £1.5 million must be returned, unspent, to the Government. Given the time requirements of the inquiry, it is unlikely that any more money will be spent in the coming financial year. I hope that Ministers will examine this matter, highlight the incompetence of the Labour councillors who control Kent county council and exert pressure so that progress can be made.

I am most grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to raise these four, admittedly parochial, issues that are of great concern to my constituents.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. In the time available for the remainder of the

[Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse]

debate, no fewer than 11 hon. Members are hoping to catch my eye. With a little co-operation, all of them might be successful.

10.13 am

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I value the time for this debate, so I hope that I shall be able to express my views succinctly.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I have been Members of this House long enough to know that one of the Government's habits is to wait until the House is nearing the recess and then provide—especially on the last day—a series of written answers containing a great deal of politically sensitive and difficult material. That is not a new trick, but is one that the current Government have played with total effrontery and, in the past few years, with an increasing lack of respect. I do not think that the Leader of the House is aware of the extent to which individual Ministries save up for the last day those matters that they do not know how to present and put them all on the Order Paper at the last minute. A classic example is the difficulties relating to the important issue of railway pensions.

I am an individual member of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, and I remember that, during the passage of the Railways Act 1993, there was a considerable altercation with the Government, who accepted that they could not deal with the existing pension fund by simply taking all the money into the Treasury and keeping it for their own purposes. The Government did not make it clear, however, that future pensioners of the railway industry would have to see large sums of money being taken out of the pension funds and used as sweeteners for private buyers of existing assets, yet that is happening on an increasing scale.

It is deplorable that those who contribute to a pension fund—either taxpayers or fund members—should suddenly discover that their moneys are to be used, not to enhance benefits for individual pensioners, but to improve the tax position of someone who is already buying assets that will be of considerable use in the future. When we examine carefully what has happened in respect of railway franchises, we see that some of them do not make sense—they are being lauded as of such advantage to taxpayer that the incoming companies will end up in a negative position: in other words, they will be paying the Government for the holding of the franchise.

I am a very trusting creature, but when I read that, my little brain thinks, "That's interesting—why should a commercial firm want to take over assets in that manner and be prepared to pay a considerable sum to the Government at the end of its period of tenure?" Then I read the report by the Comptroller and Auditor General of the National Audit Office on the award of the first three passenger rail franchises. We have not yet reached the stage at which we can use visual aids, which will come as a great relief to most hon. Members; but it is important that hon. Members should know that when I refer to the report, I am talking about figure 8 on page 33, which sets out the subsidy payable to British Rail in 1995-96 and to the franchise companies from 1996 onwards.

Figure 8 shows that there is an impressive fall in the amount of subsidy for the three franchises, so taxpayers should be delighted that they are, in theory, getting such good value for money. Then one suddenly realises that, if those same companies know that they are to be given access to large sums of pension fund money, which they can use as they want in terms of contribution holidays, the reality does not match the appearance on paper. Far from the companies being disadvantaged in any way by having to pay contributions to the Government, they will have access to large pension surpluses to which they did not contribute and for which they are not responsible, but which the companies can use to subsidise their businesses.

In my opinion, that is sharp practice, and I think that members of the pension funds will agree with me. If there are surpluses in a pension fund, as there are in the British Rail fund, those surpluses should be used to enhance the benefits of those who contributed to the fund and those who work in the industry. They should not be consistently used to subsidise private companies.

That is an extremely unhealthy and unacceptable practice, which the Government have kept very quiet about. They have not sought to draw it to the attention of people considering the effects of the Bill that became the Railways Act 1993 or of people who currently contribute to pension funds. If it is such an excellent process, why is that the case? Why have not the Government simply said, "One of the deals that we shall make in unloading what we regard as loss-making services on to the private sector is that we shall give large sweeteners—£500 million sweeteners at every level—so that the franchise companies do jolly well out of it, whatever happens"?

There are fears—which, sadly, I believe to be well founded—that some companies will take the money from the public service obligation, bank it or squirrel it away and, when the going gets rough, find it very easy to go bankrupt. The 1993 Act provides that, if that does happen and private companies go bankrupt, the taxpayer, who owned the original asset, who lost that asset to a private company and who is sweetening that private company's finances, must pay for replacement services. Whichever way one looks at it, the taxpayer is caught coming and going, and that is reprehensible.

I am afraid that several nasty little bombs are sitting upstairs in the Press Gallery, waiting for the Government. When access is given to information, nasty questions are always tucked away in the Press Gallery long before they are given to Members of Parliament, and we might have a nasty habit of raising those matters on the Floor of the House just before we rise. That will not happen, because we shall not have the information.

I nevertheless believe that the Leader of the House has a specific task for the recess—to say firmly to some Ministers that, irrespective of party involvement, it does them and the House of Commons no good if that practice becomes more widespread. It is not helpful when Ministers say in a text that they hand out to the press, "We are thinking of privatising the Coastguard," and then, when Members such as myself question that, the Government say, "We did not mean that. The Minister did not say that. It is one of the things that he is thinking about, but he did not say it even though it was in the text." When Ministers of the Crown send out press notices and texts, if they do not intend to do what they have said they will do, they should tell everyone why they have changed their minds.

The acquisition of people's surplus pension funds will not damage the employees of the old British Rail—who, luckily, were protected by the action of Members of

Parliament who made public what was likely to happen—but future contributors under the privatised system will find their surplus pension funds used by their employers in a way that they are not aware of and would not support.

The House of Commons has a duty to examine more closely the behaviour of the present Government. Their stewardship is reprehensible, and I hope that we shall be able to alert the public to the appalling things that happen daily.

10.23 am

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): Before the House adjourns for the Christmas recess, I wish to raise three matters, but first I shall mention some pieces of good news.

It is splendid news that unemployment has fallen below 2 million—I understand that the precise figure is 1,938,000. Obviously, every person who wants to work and cannot find employment is a human tragedy, but the House will rejoice that unemployment has fallen below 2 million for the first time. I understand that there has also been an unexpected boost to retail sales and that the markets are reacting extremely well.

The second piece of good news is that the present Conservative Government introduced the national lottery. Increasingly, not enough credit is given to the Government for the amount of money given to various organisations in our constituencies. I am delighted, therefore, that yesterday I received a letter headed, "Third grant programme: Health, Disability and Care", telling me that the Basildon and District Crossroads organisation—a community-based respite service for carers of people suffering from short-term memory loss—will be given £118,477. That is magnificent. I know that all the local carers will be delighted.

The third piece of good news was the ten-minute rule Bill—the Abortion (Amendment) Bill—which I successfully introduced yesterday, to amend the Abortion Act 1967. I was delighted that it received an unopposed First Reading. I was slightly confused, however. An Opposition Member spoke for seven minutes against the Bill. There was a loud call of "Division" and I appointed Tellers but, for some reason, no Opposition Tellers were appointed.

I know that there is some difficulty between the Government and the Opposition at the moment, but I am confused. An Opposition Member spoke for seven minutes and any number of Members entered the Chamber to oppose the Bill. One would have thought that two Tellers could have been appointed from the people who opposed the Bill, but no doubt—

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): I got in a bit of trouble about that yesterday. The hon. Gentleman is constantly confused about such situations. The voice of the hon. Member opposing the ten-minute rule Bill motion is what matters. There does not necessarily have to be a Division.

Mr. Amess: That is an interesting explanation; obviously we will rearrange our business in the House in future. I believe that the general public would draw the conclusion—

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman, having made a slight clown of himself yesterday, should choose to keep bringing the matter up. As it suits him to do so, however, let me explain, because he obviously does not understand. Yesterday he announced a date on which he believes that his Bill will be considered. If there is a debate, the House will have no trouble in considering what he proposes and voting then. This is a serious matter, and if the Bill were anything other than an extraordinarily self-seeking bit of publicity, the hon. Gentleman would be aware of that and would behave sensibly.

Mr. Amess: I do not need lessons from the hon. Lady. To suggest that many well-intentioned people throughout the country who supported the Bill yesterday thought that it was a clown is deeply distasteful. The hon. Lady knows that it was gutlessness on the part of several individuals who did not want the recorded vote, and that is a disgrace.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Does my hon. Friend believe that the true explanation is as follows? Yesterday we were discussing one of the most important questions that could come before the House—not an issue to be taken lightly, as Opposition Members said earlier. It concerns the value, the sanctity, the dignity of human life, and I am ashamed that Opposition Members should speak as they have. Is it not a fact that the Opposition did not appoint Tellers, did not want to vote yesterday, because they were, rightly, ashamed of what they were doing?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must inform the House that I was in the Chair on that occasion yesterday, and I ruled on the points of order then. Nothing has changed between then and now.

Mr. Amess: The first matter I want to raise is about a constituent in prison. No doubt we all have constituents in prison, and never before, in the years that I have been in the House, have I raised a specific matter concerning a constituent in prison. I have spent an enormous amount of time, however, on that constituent's circumstances; the wife visits my surgery every week, as does my constituent's brother, who is a constituent of the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). I shall raise one or two points about that gentleman's circumstances.

Just this morning I received a letter from my constituent's brother in the following terms:

"Mr. X has been wrongly convicted by the use of fabricated evidence. This was 'observation logs' supposedly contemporaneously written by the police and since been shown to be provably false".

The complaints investigation bureau, he says, was granted a dispensation allowing it not to conduct further inquiries because of a 12-month time limitation statute—this despite the seriousness of the allegations, which were that the police had fabricated evidence and had lied on oath.

The point of most concern has been the refusal of the Post Office for more than a year now to answer the question whether a reward was paid following the rejection of my constituent's appeal. This matter greatly disturbs the family. I have tried to get an answer out of the Post Office; we are all busy people, but I have yet to receive a letter signed by the chairman. The last letter that I received stated:

"As Mr. X will no doubt have made you aware, he was arrested by armed police officers of the South East Regional Crime Squad and was prosecuted by the Crown Prosecution Service for his

[Mr. Amess]

actions. The Post Office Security and Investigation Services were involved in the case to safeguard the interests of the Post Office and to assist if necessary with any specialist or commercially confidential information. Inquiries have been made at Sir Michael's request; however it transpires that the Post Office does not possess a transcript of the trial in this case. In the circumstances I am afraid that I cannot assist you with regard to any instructions that the trial judge may have had in relation to rewards."

As I have said, my constituents are greatly worried. I have a responsibility to my constituent who is in prison, and I intend to carry the case forward. If my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House can do anything to help me, I will greatly appreciate that.

Next I want to consider a trip that my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) and I made to Brussels a few weeks ago to visit the Commissioner responsible for structural funds and the Fisheries Commissioner. We took with us a local fisherman and a local business person, and we had a very successful meeting. I had never met Commissioner Bonino before; contrary to what I expected, my meeting with her was a complete delight. We raised four points with her. She listened carefully to them all and responded positively.

By contrast, the behaviour of the local Labour Member of the European Parliament was quite extraordinary. He has had every opportunity to help local fishermen. When he learned from the newspapers of our trip, he wrote to us giving us "permission" to visit Brussels. It really is going a bit far to suggest that my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point and I needed this man's permission to visit Brussels. He also said that he would be happy to join us, but my hon. Friend and I were not happy to have the MEP along with us for our deliberations.

Commissioner Bonino told us that, during the two years this man has been a Member of the European Parliament, he has had every opportunity to meet her; she would be happy to meet him, she said, any time, any place—yet he has never chosen to arrange such a meeting. By asking to join my hon. Friend and me, he was clearly trying to get some free publicity. I leave the House to judge his actions.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said that she was disappointed with announcements by Ministers. I, on the other hand, received this morning a letter from the Minister responsible for our fisheries who has been to visit our part of Essex. He is trying to do everything he can to secure extra funding for dredging the Thames estuary and to help the cockles industry.

My last point relates to local government in Essex, where controversy reigns between the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. Indeed, they have had a great falling out. I understand that my right hon. Friend may refer to the issue later this morning. A Liberal county councillor in Brentwood is so fed up with all the arguing that he has joined the Conservative party.

Yesterday my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) received a letter enclosing a Christmas card that one of his constituents had received from Basildon district council building control. That constituent has apparently only ever dealt with the council once—over a building application two years ago. The House will already know that Basildon district council has spent huge sums of money over the years on frivolous activities such as sending people Valentine cards. It would appear that the nonsense continues.

It has been widely reported that a well known former sporting personality who used to be active on the left wing of the Labour party has now joined the Liberal party. Last week the Liberal party organised a press conference to celebrate the fact. But the falling out between Labour and Liberal parties has meant that this new Liberal candidate has felt compelled to write to the local press. It is said, he argues, that in Basildon

"I failed to win an injunction to overturn the party's women-only shortlist. This is untrue. I did invoke an injunction on the Basildon Constituency Labour Party alleging irregularities in the formation of the new CLP. Delegates had not been re-elected in accordance with Labour Party rules, and therefore meetings of the general committee were invalid. The parties to these proceedings were able to reach a settlement of all matters which arose from party procedures adopted following boundary changes in Essex. No admission of liability was made. The matter has now become academic since the 1995 annual meeting of the branches and of the CLP to which new delegates have been appointed. Both sides recognise the futility of further litigating what is a moot point. Financial aspects of the proceedings have been settled to the satisfaction of the parties.

It was also claimed by Labour Party central office that I was still a fully paid up member of the party. This is also untrue. I left the Labour Party at the beginning of the year. However, this did not deter central office from expelling me from a party I did not belong to."

The Conservative party is often attacked for its internal difficulties, but our differences over Europe, honest and straightforward as they are, bear no relation to the local difficulties in Essex between the Labour and Liberal parties. It all goes to show what broad churches those parties in Essex are.

The Liberals in Essex have made a complete farce of local transport by sending buses down Hobleythick lane; traffic movements on the Marine estate and the local fire station have also been badly handled. It is no good for the Liberals immediately to have a knee-jerk reaction about a local controversy, to jump on the bandwagon and then go completely quiet when their initial reaction is found to be wanting. In Hobleythick lane, a number of residents protested, but now we find that a number of residents want the buses. Initially there were proposals to change traffic movements—

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is there any way in which you can protect the floor of the House of Commons from this trivia?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may think it is trivia, but so far the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) has been in order.

Mr. Amess: None of these matters are trivial to my constituents.

On the subject of traffic movements on the Marine estate, the Liberal council first announced that they wanted to alter traffic movements. There was a huge protest, and now the Lib-Lab council have had to back-track on that.

The final fiasco has been over proposed changes to the local fire service. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) attended what he thought was a public meeting last week at county hall, but he was not allowed to speak. Essex county council, which is controlled by the Liberals and the Labour party, has proposed many changes. After the local government settlement, we have

a 4.6 per cent. increase in funding for the fire service, but the council wants to shift resources from the south of the county to the middle of the county. The council wishes to downgrade the fire station on Canvey island in my hon. Friend's constituency and it wants to close Leigh fire station for the first time in 100 years. I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) is concerned about that prospect.

I will visit Basildon fire station later this week and I am concerned about the fact that the foam tender from Basildon will be relocated to Corringham. It is bit of a cheek for local Liberal activists to say that Essex county council's proposals are terrible and that it is all the fault of the Government because of underfunding. That is not the case. The council has been given more money than it has ever been given before and the fire brigade committee is headed by a Liberal county councillor.

Dr. Spink: I wish to clarify one point. The Liberal group on Essex county council accept that the purpose of the proposals is not to save money or make cuts, but to redistribute existing resources. The move is not Government-driven and all the political parties accept that point.

Mr. Amess: I thank my hon. Friend for that clarification. If my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House does not have time to answer all my points this morning, perhaps he could get the various Departments to write to me.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members will recall that, a few moments ago, I drew the attention of the House to the fact that many hon. Members wished to take part in the debate, and I asked them to consider that. So far, in some cases, my request has been ignored. I hope for some co-operation from now on.

10.42 am

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I shall be as brief as I can, but in contrast to some of the other contributions, I wish to refer to a matter of great national concern—indeed, a multi-million pound scandal, which I hope the Government will address urgently during the recess. I refer to the over-30-months cattle cull and the lessons that I hope Ministers are now learning for the new accelerated slaughter scheme that the Minister announced on Monday.

In a question to the Minister on Monday, I put this point:

"paragraph 24 of the consultation paper suggests that the way in which the slaughter will be allocated to abattoirs will be similar to that under the 30-months scheme. Is he aware of the real concerns about the way in which a small number of abattoirs have profiteered and made a killing from the scheme? The new scheme must be put out to competitive tender."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1996; Vol. 287, c. 636.]

The Minister replied to an earlier part of my question, but made no response whatever to that latter point. For that reason, I seek the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House in pressing Ministers to take a new look at the lessons of the over-30-months scheme.

Hon. Members will recall that the Minister announced the over-30-months scheme on 28 March. He took an arbitrary age with innumerable practical difficulties. The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee had recommended that the 30-months age limit should be used for the removal of specified bovine offals. The use of the limit for the whole carcase to be removed from the human food chain was a political decision and had no scientific basis.

An important article, entitled "How the Government turned the beef crisis into a £2.4bn gravy train", was published in the *Daily Mail* on December 5. It was written by Dr. Richard North who, as hon. Members will know, is an internationally recognised food safety analyst, to whom we are all grateful on this and many other issues. He wrote:

"The scheme has devastated farmers, and taxpayers have been major losers but, as will be revealed on a Channel 4 programme tonight, a new scandal has emerged.

A small group of businessmen who own some of Britain's largest slaughterhouses have literally been making a killing out of the scheme, amassing windfall profits estimated at more than £200 million.

To understand how such a situation came about, we must recall the events immediately after Health Secretary Stephen Dorrell announced to the House of Commons on March 20 the link between Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) and BSE. He cited a recommendation from . . . SEAC that—since some cattle over 30 months old might possibly be harbouring BSE infectivity, although not in the meat—all such cattle should be boned out after killing, before their meat could be sold. This process would allow the removal of potentially infected parts.

Immediately Douglas Hogg banned the sale of meat from all cattle over 30 months old, until a deboning scheme could be arranged."

It is clear that that was to be a temporary scheme. However, just as Ministry officials were about to send out instructions to specifically licensed abattoirs, cutters and butchers, there was a change of heart.

Under pressure from the National Farmers Union, itself blackmailed by the burger giants and the supermarkets, the Minister buckled and the over-30-months scheme for the whole carcase became permanent, not temporary. Richard North's article continues:

"The overpayment scandal began when, faced with the massive problem of slaughtering millions of cattle, the Government bypassed the established practice of awarding contracts by tender. It gave 20 slaughterhouses—out of 470 in the UK—the rights to do most of the killing.

Although some independent slaughterhouses bid £20 per head, MAFF ignored them and awarded the favoured few a lucrative 'provisional' fee of £87 per head, plus the value of the hide, bringing the effective price to more than £100—a £100 million cash bonanza."

That was but the start of the scandal. Almost immediately, despite pressure from hon. Members on both sides of the House, instead of allocating the competitive tendering bids to those who had submitted them, the Government gave the cull contracts to only 21 plants, although 72 had been approved and some 200 were eligible.

In the debate that I led on 13 May on the continuing delay and confusion that arose from the cattle cull scheme, the Minister mentioned, in answer to questions,

"the 21 that are in it at the moment, but the larger number which I hope will come into it".—[*Official Report*, 13 May 1996; Vol. 277, c. 703.]

In other words, other abattoirs might become involved, but no others were added for many weeks.

On 21 May, as we all know, the Prime Minister declared the infamous and totally counter-productive beef war, but surreptitiously the same afternoon he issued a

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

press statement removing the over-30-months scheme from the control of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and giving it to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

At the same time, the Federation of Fresh Meat Wholesalers issued a memorandum to its members that stated:

"Rumours and gossip verging on the scurrilous are widespread. If for short term reasons these are wound up to produce political pressure on Ministers, we are concerned that the option remains for them to take emergency powers, requisition a small number of plants and take total control of the cull themselves".

In other words, Ministers were not in control.

During that period, both the big abattoirs and the Ministers were blaming the renderers for what had gone wrong. However, it seems that the renderers were asking only for through-put seven days a week for which they could cater. The smaller abattoirs were never told about that—in fact, they were bidding blind. Many of them would have been eager to participate and could have filled the Monday, Friday and weekend gaps.

There appears to be a hidden agenda. During that time, the industry was being restructured by default: bigger units were given greater responsibilities and bigger and bigger profits. We should remember that earlier this year, before the BSE bombshell, the Meat and Livestock Commission—which was being pressurised by larger abattoirs—was aiming for the "broilerisation of beef", as it is called in the United States.

At the end of the beef war, on 24 June, the Prime Minister said:

"The targets that we have set are ambitious. It is now up to us in this country—the farming and ancillary industries and the Government—to ensure that we meet them. The point is that this timetable is essentially in our hands."—[*Official Report*, 24 June 1996; Vol. 280, c. 22.]

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food subsequently back-tracked on that unequivocal statement in the House, and have done so again this week.

The Prime Minister was confident because he said that the OTM cull would be completed by October, but that did not happen. The main reason for the failure to proceed with the so-called accelerated slaughter scheme was that the abattoirs could not cope with any more animals. An insufficient number of abattoirs were forced to try to conduct the cull. The idea was that the Minister would draw up a formal working document after Florence. However, we still have not seen it.

On 17 July, I took a small deputation comprising abattoir and incineration managers from the south-west to see the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. He assured us that the OTM cull delays and the backlog would be swiftly removed. Despite his explicit promise, that did not occur.

In August, the Government's auditor, Coopers and Lybrand, produced its second report—which remains unpublished. It said that the economic cost was £21 per beast and not the £87-plus being paid to abattoirs. It also pointed out that abattoirs could make a further £20 to £25 from the hides. Following a threatened strike by Northern Ireland abattoirs, Ministers caved in again and agreed to a £41 minimum payment and no backdating. It is outrageous that the Coopers and Lybrand report has not been published. At the very least, the Public Accounts Committee must see it urgently.

From 23 October, farmers faced a 10 per cent. cut in the amounts that they received. The reduction was initiated by United Kingdom Ministers in Brussels and was aggravated by a revaluation of the green pound thereafter.

On 21 November, there was the curious case of the missing corpses. I pointed out to the Minister that, although the cull was progressing, nobody could put a figure on the number of carcases that were being refrigerated. Despite more questions on Monday, we still do not know how many carcases are in refrigerated storage. The Minister has not dealt with that huge problem, which also has lessons for the accelerated slaughter scheme.

While the farmers were forced to take a cut, not so the big abattoirs. There was a renegotiation in November which, again, was not published. Richard North's article—which succinctly reports what happened—states:

"The only legal buyers, the slaughterhouses carrying out the disposals, were offering at times prices of £200 less than the official compensation rate. Millions flowed into their coffers by this route.

This exercise has evaporated now that the backlog has all but been cleared. But the slaughterhouses have not had to fall back on the profits of a mere £41 killing fee. Last month"—

that is, November—

"they renegotiated their fee structure, bringing them up to £131 for some animals—backdated to August 26.

Thus, as the animals pour through the slaughterhouses of the favoured few, millions more are pouring into the owners' bank accounts.

The strangest thing about this whole episode, the most bizarre in the history of farming, is that it is continuing at all. Already it has cost the equivalent of a penny in the pound on income tax."

The cull could have been completed and the registration process introduced months ago. Why was it not done in July, August or September? Ministers now tell us that, from 1 April 1997, abattoirs will have to submit competitive tender bids, but only for the programme after that date. We hope that the new programme will be well under way by then.

The Channel 4 "Dispatches" programme entitled "Making a Killing", which was screened on 5 December, lifted the lid on the cull shambles and the scandal. Many hon. Members and I have tabled a motion demanding that the Public Accounts Committee urgently investigates what has occurred. If we do not know what is happening to taxpayers' money, there is a real danger that the European Union Court of Auditors will want to examine the finances. It could remove all the funding from Brussels that supports the programme.

For example, if the 15 per cent. from Brussels—which has not been paid yet—is removed, British taxpayers will have to pay about £300 million extra. Ministers provided no substantial answers on the Channel 4 programme. However, the Intervention Board said that it was confident that there was "no significant overpayment". What is "significant"?

There is a footnote to this sorry saga. Since he was charged with conducting the programme, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has not spoken in a debate on the subject in the House. He has not answered questions or made a statement about the matter in the House. Is he to mastermind the accelerated scheme that the Minister of

Agriculture announced on Monday and is he answerable to the House for the huge sums of taxpayers' money that he is spending?

10.57 am

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Unemployment has fallen again by about 92,000. I have not seen that figure confirmed in writing but, if it is accurate, it means that unemployment has fallen from 2,030,000 to 1,938,000. We should celebrate that achievement throughout the country, because unemployment affects people dramatically.

While we are celebrating our excellent economic performance, we should contrast it with the performance on jobs and employment of countries in continental Europe, who are not performing as well as us. Perhaps that has something to do with their minimum wage, the social chapter, inflexible employment structures and non-wage labour costs, which are much higher than ours. We must resist placing such burdens on our industry, thereby making it less competitive and less flexible. We must not follow the policies that the Opposition parties advocate, which would destroy our competitiveness, our jobs and our economy.

Castle Point has shared in the good news. Unemployment peaked at about 4,600 during my time as the Member of Parliament and is now well below 2,500—a fall of more than 40 per cent. I cannot claim to have been instrumental in bringing about that decrease, but I can claim that the Government have been instrumental in setting economic conditions of low inflation, low interest rates, high inward investment and a highly competitive and flexible labour market and economy. That is why jobs have been created in Castle Point and why I am sure that the people of Castle Point will give their verdict at the next election on Opposition policies that would destroy and reverse the trend of falling unemployment in the constituency.

I come now to an equally serious matter. Mr. Geoff Lythgoe dedicated the last years of his life to building the business opportunities for the physically handicapped centre on Canvey island. He was a good man: he was community spirited and spent much of his time working for disadvantaged people. Sadly, he died in the middle of this year. I visited him in hospital just before he died, and he expressed his concern about the future of the centre. I helped Geoff's widow, Joan, to put in a bid to the national lottery. It was successful, and an award of £75,000 was made yesterday.

I am proud to have been associated with such a wonderful man, and proud of the Government's national lottery policy. That policy was opposed by 183 Opposition Members, who voted against the Second Reading of the National Lottery Bill. I am proud to have voted for that policy, which has created 100,000 jobs throughout the country and, I hope, will now create a few more on Canvey island in my constituency.

I want to focus on Canvey island, and to refer to the three issues that I raised on the front page of the *Canvey Island Times* before prior to the last election. I pressed for an independent sixth form on Canvey island. My Labour opponent fought vociferously against that initiative. The Liberal Democrat candidate was also against it. I have good news for you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because year after year you have had to sit in that Chair and endure me batting on about a sixth form for Canvey island. You will not have to hear that again, because we won.

The Conservative Government awarded a sixth form to Canvey island last week. I am proud to have been associated with that battle. I am only sorry that the local Labour party so forcefully tried to prevent that facility being made available to the young people on Canvey island, and to the community of nearly 40,000 people. Labour has betrayed my constituents on Canvey island.

The second matter that I raised was the provision of an accident unit; I suppose that it could be called a cottage hospital for Canvey island. I pushed for that, and said on the front page of the *Canvey Island Times* that I was

"Totally in favour of an accident unit for Canvey".

Neither Labour nor the Liberal Democrats mentioned this health provision for Canvey island, either in the front-page report or during the election campaign.

On 19 March, the health authority said:

"Following representations from Dr. Spink, we are investing in a package of services including an outpatient clinic and X-ray service in the former Council offices on Canvey."

I am proud to have been associated with the provision of that clinic. I shall speak in more detail about it in a moment.

The third matter that I raised in the front-page report in the *Canvey Island Times* before the last general election was the improvement in investment and rolling stock on the London, Tilbury and Southend line, which was then known as the misery line. It was unreliable, not punctual and a misery for my constituents. Investment of £180 million has been provided for resignalling and track improvements. Prism Rail, which took on the franchise, is to place a £150 million order for new rolling stock.

Two weeks ago, I had a photograph taken with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on one of the cascaded 10-year-old trains, which are replacing the 35-year-old trains. He has brought forward the policy of privatisation, which has enabled this investment. Furthermore, £14 million will be spent on stations, such as Benfleet station, to improve access for disabled people and to improve information and security. If people feel safer on the trains, they will be encouraged to use them. Those investments are to be welcomed.

It is a little surprising that Labour councillors—who fought tooth and nail against the privatisation that has led to those investments—should now try to associate themselves with the health clinic on Canvey island and with the investments by the privatised railway.

The health clinic on Canvey island will open in January next year. It will provide facilities for gynaecology; neurology; general surgery; orthopaedics; rheumatology; dermatology; urology; diabetes; blood tests; X-ray; ear, nose and throat; and midwifery. Facilities for ophthalmology and oncology, which deals with cancer, will be provided later in the year. My constituents deserve those facilities, and they have been provided entirely by Government money.

I am proud to have delivered on those three election promises for Canvey island. If I am determined and outspoken when I am fighting for Canvey island, so be it: that is why the people of Canvey island voted for me, and why they will vote for me again.

The cottage hospital is provided by the Southend-on-Sea hospital trust and the district health authority from Government money. My right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon), my hon.

[Dr. Robert Spink]

Friends the Members for Basildon (Mr. Amess), for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and I pressed the Minister for that extra money. We make no apologies for fighting hard for it.

I shall now refer to some matters that have not gone quite so well for Canvey island. The exit road from Canvey island is high on my list of priorities. It was high on the county council's list of priorities until the county council was taken over by Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors. They control the council and have now put the exit road from Canvey island down the list of priorities.

The exit road is not needed just for convenience and to alleviate congestion; it is required for safety, because Canvey island is a special case. The Labour borough council has approved developers' plans. It should not have done that: it is proving to be the developers' friend, which is very sad. I fought against the de Savary land application that went to appeal and which the Secretary of State called in. The inspector found in favour of the applicant, but I fought on and went to the Secretary of State, who eventually supported me and turned down the application.

It is sad that Labour councillors are not prepared to back me and enable me to fight to prevent the new development proposals. They are proving themselves the developers' friends by approving the development against the wishes of the people. Such developments destroy our environment and communities. They overdevelop our communities and put too much burden on our infrastructure—schools, libraries and sewage works. Moreover, many jobs will be destroyed if an inappropriate, major, out-of-town shopping unit is built.

I come now to the fire station, which my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon has already mentioned. I shall cover this important matter in some detail.

Mr. Flynn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have asked hon. Members to be brief. The hon. Gentleman has been speaking for 11 minutes and now says that he is going into greater detail. He will prevent several Opposition Members from making a speech. That is selfish and an abuse.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I had hoped that my intervention would enable all hon. Members to speak if they so wished. I have no control over the length of hon. Members' speeches; they are responsible for that.

Dr. Spink: I hear what you say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I shall move on apace. I hope to take less time than the average taken by hon. Members this morning.

Councillors are seeking to close the full-time station on Canvey island, which would leave only a retained station with no full-time cover. It would be manned by part-time firefighters, who, in an emergency, would be called out to the fire station from their homes and work if they were available. Councillors state that this is not a cost-cutting measure, but is purely an attempt to ensure that fire resources across the county are most effectively deployed.

The Home Office has confirmed to me that to close the station or to convert a full-time station into a retained station would require section 19 approval. I have already contacted Lady Blatch, and I shall be doing all that I can to put the case for keeping Canvey island fire station as a full-time station. It should not be closed.

Councillors say that they arrived at their recommendation following assessment of the standards relating to risk, response times, distances and the number of call-outs for engines. Those are interesting statistics, but it would be breathtakingly naive to fail to take account of the special circumstances that exist on Canvey island. In regard to risk, councillors now claim that people on Canvey island are not concerned about flooding; yet, according to a recent constituency-wide survey published in the "Westminster Report", people said that flood defence was one of the two top local issues, equalled only by the reduction in council tax. I can only conclude that the statistic has been misrepresented, because people on Canvey island are concerned about flooding—as anyone would be who lived there in 1953, when 58 people were drowned.

There are many special circumstances on Canvey island. It is a relatively isolated community, with a population approaching 40,000. During peak traffic times, when fires often occur, it is blocked off. That can happen at any time of day when there is a road accident: it has happened twice in recent times. Moreover, houses are tightly packed, and will be even more tightly packed following Labour councillors' recent decision to cram more houses in. That poses the risk that fires will spread and become major catastrophes. Furthermore, in comparison with the middle and the north of Essex, Canvey island is socially deprived, and the fire risk is much higher in areas of relative deprivation.

If councillors also close Leigh fire station—it is east of Hadleigh, while Canvey island is west of it—they will pull the fire engines from Hadleigh station in two different directions. That will affect the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon as well as mine, which is why he is fighting so fiercely to keep Leigh station open. The chief fire officer has admitted to me that the county council's recommendations would result in an increased call-out time, and therefore in a higher risk to life and limb on Canvey island. I do not wish to scaremonger, but that is a simple fact.

I am appalled that councillors are considering cutting our fire stations, when the Government have given them an extra £1,548,000 this year. That is an increase of 4.6 per cent., double the rate of inflation. There is no reason for the councillors to cut fire services; they should be improving them. South Essex is the centre of our wealth generating community in Essex—it is the centre of population—but, yet again, councillors at county hall in Chelmsford are deciding to move resources and facilities from the south of Essex to the centre and the north. They did the same with education and road projects throughout the last decade. I will fight to keep our full-time station open, and I am sure that the public are behind me.

Councillors cut funds for the flood warning systems on Canvey island by £4,000 last year. They also tried to get rid of 41 firemen, but, along with colleagues, I fought that successfully.

In recent times, Canvey island has done exceedingly well in some respects. There is the clinic, investment in the railways, the creation of jobs and the new sixth form—all developments that were entirely the Government's responsibility, and under their control.

Where the Labour-controlled borough council and the Labour and Liberal-controlled county council have had responsibility—fire services, flood warning systems and the exit road are examples—Canvey island has done exceedingly badly. Councillors should hang their heads in shame; and I know that they greatly fear the next local elections.

10.14 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I want to raise two issues. The first relates to London hospitals and health care services.

This is the beginning of winter. We never know what kind of weather we shall have in London or, indeed, elsewhere in the country, but we do know that, over the years, London has suffered from cuts in the national health service. Hospitals and wards have closed, and we have lost a great many beds.

My constituency contains St. George's hospital, Tooting. It is an excellent hospital, staffed by dedicated people, but they, along with staff in all the other London hospitals, are being put under increasing pressure to provide services. Last winter, we suffered on-going problems throughout the hospital, but especially in the accident and emergency department, where patients waited on trolleys for beds for hours on end.

Yesterday, the *Evening Standard*—which, to its credit, has played a major role in highlighting health care problems in London—published, on its front page, the headline "Emergency Wards Chaos", and, below that, the headline "Consultant quits in protest as crisis hits London hospitals". The report referred to my local health authority, the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth authority, which covers St. George's hospital. Chief consultant Dr. John Thurston was quoted as saying:

"This is the beginning of our winter rush. Last winter was the worst ever with a major crisis in south-west London and we are expecting to see the same thing happen this winter.

Really, they should be expanding services rather than trying to run them down. It worries me and I don't want to be part of it."

Dr. Thurston has now resigned from his position as chief consultant to work in another hospital outside the area.

Dr. Thurston went on to say:

"It seems extraordinary to me that just as we are coming up to winter, they are cutting down on services."

Referring to an adjoining hospital that faces enormous problems, he said:

"Kingston cannot cope . . . They are inundated with work, as we are."

Geoff Martin, of the watchdog service, London Health Emergency, said:

"We are scared because there aren't enough casualty departments in London now, and we are getting patients stacking up on trolleys in corridors."

It is now December. May I ask the Leader of the House what action the Government will take now—not in the coming months of 1997—to ensure that accident and emergency services, not only in my health authority but throughout London, can meet the needs of Londoners? The right hon. Gentleman was a distinguished Secretary of State for Social Security, and he knows how vital the issue is to London. I ask him to convey to the present Secretary of State for Health the deep concern that I feel about my health authority. I am sure that my comments could be echoed by many other hon. Members representing London constituencies, irrespective of party.

The other issue that I wish to raise is connected with the fact that, this week, the Foreign Secretary made the first visit to Cyprus by such a senior Foreign Office Minister for more than 30 years. As chair of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Cyprus group in the House, I welcome that visit. It was much heralded by pre-visit statements and, I understand, by an interview broadcast on the popular and respected London Greek radio station. Regrettably, however, the Foreign Secretary's visit lasted for less than 24 hours.

I have a copy of the Foreign Secretary's statement, and the 10 points highlighted by him during his visit. Much of this is well known, as it is based on United Nations statements and resolutions. I assume that the 10 points constitute the Government's policy on Cyprus. I fully support comments such as those about the sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus and that there will be no right of petition or secession. I also support the security of both Greek and Turkish Cypriots being achieved by international guarantees and the membership of Cyprus of the European Union. No doubt many hon. Members fully support those aims.

Unfortunately, the Foreign Secretary's statement did not include the important issue of the role of Turkey and Ankara. That is a key factor in any negotiations because of Turkey's continuing contacts with Mr. Denktas. Sir David Hannay, the British special envoy to Cyprus, regularly visits Turkey for discussions. We expect Turkey to play a major role in the negotiations. We must never lose sight of the fact that, a year ago, Turkey became a member of the European customs union. As we all know, there are trade-offs in politics. A country that achieves a desirable aim, then, should be helpful on issues on which it has influence, as does Turkey on Cyprus.

I welcome Turkey's involvement, but as one of the guarantor powers for Cyprus and a member of the Commonwealth, we must make it clear that, while Turkey is welcome in the negotiations because of the role that it can play, it will have no veto whatever, and certainly not on a settlement or on the issue of Cyprus's membership of the European Union.

Another issue that was not mentioned in the Foreign Secretary's statement was the demilitarisation of Cyprus. Mr. Clerides, the President of the Republic of Cyprus, has presented a plan for that and such developments are vital because, as we all know, there has been an enormous build-up of arms in Cyprus. It would be interesting to know the view of the Foreign Secretary and the Government on President Clerides' proposals on demilitarisation.

This week, the British press gave a great deal of coverage to the Foreign Secretary's visit. After 22 years of division in the island, we certainly want an honourable settlement. I wish the talks that start next year every success, but already there are demands from Mr. Denktash—as there have been since the events of 1974—in connection with Cyprus's membership of the European Union. He is hostile to that, and has views on sovereignty, security and territory in Cyprus. Yesterday *The Independent* stated:

"Turks pour cold water on Rifkind's Cyprus mission."

[Mr. Tom Cox]

That shows that, within days of the Foreign Secretary's visit to Cyprus, Turkey is not all that interested in the proposals. Is that true?

I hope that the Government will make their position plain, because hon. Members wish to see the rights of Greek and Turkish Cypriots fully honoured in any settlement. I hope that the Government and all parties represented in the House will make it clear to Mr. Denktash and to Turkey that they must play a constructive role that works towards a settlement. We should set out what we expect from next year's discussions.

The Foreign Secretary has spoken about the importance of the 1997 discussions. We need to know from the Government the role of the United States of America in those talks. The USA has had a special envoy in Cyprus, and the new Secretary of State, Mrs. Madeleine Albright, has a knowledge of Cyprus. The United States certainly has a role to play there, and I hope that we will work in full support of that country throughout the discussions. It knows how crucial are the issues surrounding a united Cyprus, especially because of the continuing tensions in the Mediterranean area, in which Cyprus is an important country.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There are 45 minutes to go before the start of the winding-up speeches and, in that time, five hon. Members hope to catch my eye. I hope that they will all be successful.

11.25 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) made a powerful contribution on the issue of railway pensions and sweeteners. I say amen to what she said. I have a question which I hope will be answered during the winding-up speeches. Can the Leader of the House find out from the Treasury its assessment of the proposed saving to the taxpayer of this so-called sweetener operation? The same question could be asked about the privatisation of the Building Research Establishment. With that I couple the question, what will be the objective device that the building industry trusts? If the research facility is privatised, there will be deep questions about whether contractors would be willing to go to a private building organisation in the way that they have gone to the BRE in the past. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) will know about that because he was engaged in running the council.

I wish to raise two matters, one of which is extremely urgent and relates to the dreadful events last night in Lima, Peru. It is not clear whether British subjects were involved. Sally Bowman seems to have got out and it appears that the British ambassador left before the raid started. The incident raises urgent issues, one of which is international violence. For the first time, possibly for hundreds of years, there is no war in the world. However, there is much interfactional violence ranging from events in Chechnya to, now, Lima. I speak as the vice-chairman of the all-party Latin America group. I went to Lima in 1984 and had to go through armed guards to the private house of the ex-Prime Minister, Manuel Ulloa, who was Prime Minister at the time of the Falklands war—which was the subject of my visit. There were also guards when we went to see President Belaunde Terry.

Peru is a violent country and the Shining Path organisation may be among the roughest, toughest and most determined terrorists on the face of the planet. I am sorry for the Government of Peru. This is an urgent matter for us all because there could easily be copycat incidents. First, I seek any kind of information from the Government about British involvement. Secondly, what measures are likely to be taken for the protection of our embassies' where such incidents, alas, are all too likely to happen? We must never underestimate the copycat factor in the light of such an incident. I ask for a statement on that matter.

My last point has been raised endlessly. Can some judgment be arrived at, at last, after eight long years, on the Lockerbie issue? For the first time, there will not be a service this year at Westminster abbey. It is eight years since, on a point of order, on that dreadful evening as the rumours filtered through, I asked about the crash of a huge airliner not far from my constituency.

Not only are the relatives still dissatisfied, but sanctions go on and on against Libya. That damages British industry. There is a project worth about $10 billion, but the beneficiaries are not British firms, as they might have been because many Libyan decision makers were educated at our technical colleges and universities and not, like those in many Arab countries, in the United States. The loss is Britain's. Apart from moral considerations, this is an urgent matter for British industry.

I recognise that, in the early 1980s, the Libyans were not angels. I accept the views of the right hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Needham) and others who have had ministerial responsibility that arms went to the south of Ireland from Libya and that they should not have done, but that is different from saying that Libya was responsible for the Lockerbie crime. It is eight long years since it happened.

Before we come back on 13 January, could some serious consideration be given to the matter? In his answer to my written question yesterday, which has not yet appeared in *Hansard*, the Prime Minister said:

"The Arab League and some Arab Governments have pressed for sanctions to be lifted and a compromise reached on Lockerbie."

That is also the view of many African Governments. President Mandela wrote a personal letter on the subject to the British Prime Minister. Before we come back, could some serious reflection be given to an on-going, deeply unsatisfactory position?

11.30 am

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who always raises matters of key importance and who campaigns persistently on issues. Many of us should learn from him about the way in which matters should be approached, especially in a debate such as this.

I wish to raise the issue of opencast mining in the north-east corner of Derbyshire. That issue affects the well-being of people in my constituency and in the Chesterfield and Bolsover constituencies.

I want to place this in the context of the pit closure programme. No pits remain in Derbyshire. A European Community document entitled "Commission Report on the Application of the Community Rules for State Aid to the Coal Industry in 1994", which has just been published, points out that, during 1994,

"British mines whose production costs were lower than those in other Member States and which were only slightly subsidised have had to be closed for lack of a market while high-cost mines are still being worked elsewhere in Europe—a situation which has helped push up the amount of aid per tonne in the Community very considerably".

If we had only had a level playing field, we would still have pits and the communities around them in north Derbyshire, and we would not have the problems of opencast mining.

The north-east corner of Derbyshire is built on coal. There are great seams of coal from Leeds to Nottingham and Derby. North-east Derbyshire is in the middle of that. To the western side of the region, there used to be cutterills, drift mines and bell pits. To the east, the mines became deeper, so the ones that were closed were deeper mines, with the communities around them then being devastated. There is now great opencast potential in the region as we do not have the pits, and we are in danger of the green belts becoming black belts.

In the region, Budge, Fitzwise and H. J. Banks are the main operators seeking opencast avenues—and some are operating such mines already. Fitzwise and H. J. Banks have headquarters in my constituency. Arkwright is the major operator in the Bolsover constituency. Its operation involves 3.5 million tonnes and covers 417 hectares, which is a considerable development. In view of that, there should be no further development for some considerable time.

The cumulative impact of the operations—those where plans have been agreed and those where applications have been made—is considerable. I do not know how seriously minerals planning guidance note 3 takes the cumulative impact into account, but historical operations, some of which are still being used for landfill purposes, are not taken into account. The guidance note should be altered, as should much else in the note, to tighten the scope for possible applications considerably.

I raised this matter yesterday at Environment Question Time and I received the wrong answer from the Minister for Construction, Planning and Energy Efficiency, who said that historical cases were taken into account, which is not so, as anyone who examines MPG note 3 will see.

Derbyshire county council is placed in something of a cleft stick in relation to applications that it receives. It has the MPG hanging over it, and the MPG is disposed towards the acceptance of opencast applications, although the Government deny that. If the council rejects an application, however, the cost of an appeal is a considerable burden for an authority that is strapped for cash. On numerous occasions, I have raised the problems of Derbyshire county council and North East Derbyshire district council in relation to the standard spending assessment and allocation of money from Government sources. That obviously affects this whole game.

My constituents will be affected considerably if three operations go forward. The first is at Avenue Cokeworks, which has been closed. There is considerable contaminated land on the site. It is surrounded by the built-up regions of Grassmoor, Wingerworth, Tupton and Chesterfield to the north. Operations at the works cannot be easily hidden as it is in a valley, with a railway line running through the middle of it. A serious investigation is needed into the impact of operations at Avenue Cokeworks for the work force and nearby residents.

Twenty-nine claimants are operating through a Birmingham solicitor with cases relating mostly to cancer—13 ex-workers and 16 residents. Twelve are women, who live in two streets north-west of Avenue Cokeworks. The agreement that the operation should go ahead should be called in. The case is being pursued through judicial review, but there are massive problems in the region—not just the usual ones involving transport, disruption and the danger of asthma, which is a big problem at Grassmoor primary school, for instance, but serious problems involving the removal of contaminated land.

The idea is to move the former plant and to bury the contamination on the site; yet nearby at Grassmoor Lagoons, where tar and chemicals from Avenue Cokeworks are treated, bio-remediation is going to be used by the county council. If bio-remediation is appropriate in the case of Grassmoor Lagoons, it is likely that it would be also be appropriate in the case of the Avenue Cokeworks.

The second case is at the Breck. The application involves a site north of Barrow Hill and South of Eckington. The majority of the land in question is an attractive green area, currently in intensive agricultural use, with the exception of a disused tip which contains chemical and foundry waste and two oxbow lakes used as a fishery. The opencast operation would last for seven years and would provide for a waste disposal facility that would come into operation within the first year of opencasting and last for a further 19 years.

An average of one train per day would arrive at a railhead to the south of the site. Its 50 sealed containers would be unloaded and transported by road to the site. That would account for 70 per cent. of the waste. The remaining 30 per cent. would arrive entirely by road. If time permitted, I would illustrate the great problems involved in that application. Hon. Members, especially Labour Members, who know the area will understand the difficulties.

The third case is at Heath, next to junction 29 of the M1 motorway. It is a peculiar application which goes first to the district council because there is an argument that platforms should be built for firms operating as redistribution centres. Conveniently, an application will then go to the county council to get out coal that would otherwise be sterilised. The argument is that the ground there will need to be impacted. That is a great problem within the area, because certain firms moved to an industrial estate nearby on the understanding that opencast operations would not take place.

The cases that I have illustrated need to be added to other cases in which applications have already been accepted and where operations are taking place. I commend the Labour party's alternative points about opencast mining, one of which says that there would be a

"rejection of planning applications for opencasting where they may prejudice efforts to attract other investment in the locality."

I hope that that would also apply to existing investment, which would cover the third case that I mentioned.

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

These issues should be debated seriously in the House and I hope that there will be an opportunity to do so in a more comprehensive way at a later stage.

11.42 am

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): I want to use my short speech to wish people who live in Nottingham and use the national health service there a happy and healthy Christmas and new year. I also extend that greeting to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am extremely concerned about Nottingham health authority, which meets tomorrow and faces some difficult decisions about priorities. It is fair to remind the Leader of the House that,in the Budget statement last month, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke)—also a Nottinghamshire Member—told the House that priority would be given to health service issues. He told the *Nottingham Evening Post* on 27 November:

"I think you will find that he"—

the chairman of the health authority—

"has got a lot of extra money."

The reality is quite different. The health authority faces a standstill budget next year.

The basic underlying problem for the health authority is that it has been underfunded against the national formula for many years. In the current year it received 97.22 per cent. as against 100 per cent. funding. Next year, it is suggested that it will receive 97.56 per cent.—a move of just 0.34 per cent. towards the target. I say quietly and determinedly to the Leader of the House that at that rate of change it will take another seven years for it to reach average funding. It is clear to me and to those who live in Nottingham and work in the health service there that it is not receiving its fair share.

I commend everyone in Nottingham who has lobbied on what has become a bipartisan issue. It has involved hon. Members from all parties. I congratulate the chairman and chief executive of the health authority and all who work in the trust. We all want what is best for Nottingham, which is to reach the 100 per cent. target as quickly as possible.

In the longer term, I want to see more than that. Nottingham is a teaching district and, traditionally, teaching districts have had more than 100 per cent. funding. Camden receives 107 per cent., Manchester receives 106 per cent. and Ealing receives 104 per cent. They are all teaching districts. Nottinghamshire has a centre of excellence in the Queen's medical centre and, in the longer term, we need a greater slice of the cake.

Next year the health authority will have an extra £5.85 million to spend on hospital and community health services. However, it is not so clear-cut as that, because the uplift in its budget is just 2 per cent. and inflation will run at more than that. It is again being asked to make efficiency savings of 2.7 per cent. There comes a time when it is impossible to make any more efficiency savings.

In the Queen's medical centre—the biggest hospital in Europe—routine operations are not taking place this month or next month. I speculate—I do not think that I shall be far from the truth—that within the next few weeks major redundancies will be announced at the hospital. The City hospital has faced one efficiency saving after another and cut upon cut. I do not believe that much more can be done to save money there.

I wish the health authority well in its decision making tomorrow. It faces a difficult task and will have to make some hard choices. Its task would be made much easier if it and the people who live in Nottingham had a fair deal and received 100 per cent. funding. The Leader of the House will know that there is still extra money to be allocated within the NHS for next year. Perhaps he could look at the matter and talk to colleagues in the Department of Health so that some extra help can be given to Nottingham and so that people who live there can truly have a happy and healthy Christmas and a successful new year.

11.47 am

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On today's Order Paper there are three early-day motions drawing attention to the deplorable deterioration in the quality, accuracy and truthfulness of answers to questions tabled by hon. Members. It is a serious matter. The three instances quoted are taken almost at random because it has become routine recently to have answers that fit the descriptions that I have mentioned.

One answer is from the Northern Ireland Office. It said that certain documents were in the public domain. After a thorough search, using the time of my staff and the Library, and after a letter to the Department, it had to admit that the documents were not in the public domain.

The second instance refers to a contemptible and contemptuous answer given to an hon. Member last week. When he asked how many representations had been made about the possible closure of benefit offices in Wales, he was told, "A number."

The third issue is a matter of considerable seriousness, and it causes a great many problems not only for my constituents but for the constituents of all hon. Members. I tabled a question about an obligatory form—no other form can be used—to appeal against decisions made on social security matters. I received an answer from a Social Security Minister, telling me that, at my request, he had placed a copy of the form in the Library. No form was in the Library. A fortnight after the regulations came into force, on 21 October 1996, the Minister had to confess that the forms had not yet been printed, and that they would not be printed for a further fortnight. That is an utter disgrace.

The fourth matter does not appear on today's Order Paper—although it should—because the Table Office had difficulties with the wording. It is also a clear case of a Minister not telling the truth to the House. I am limited in the language that I can use in this matter, although we have recently heard such words as "dissembling". In the early-day motion, I stated that the House

"notes the deliberate, calculated untruth contained in a recent answer."

I used those words—instead of "lying", which I would have used outside the Chamber—because there is clear, incontrovertible evidence of a deliberate attempt to mislead the House.

I had tabled a question, which was dealt with by the Metropolitan police. My question is included at the top of the reply from the Metropolitan police, of 15 November 1996. It states:

"Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total cost of the police participation in the state opening of Parliament."

The reply, of 200 words, then provides the answer to my question, and includes full details and explanations of how the costing was determined and the factors that were considered. It gives a figure of £286,000. Any hon. Member would greet with pleasure such a full and detailed answer. On 20 November, however, I was told by the Home Office:

"costs of police staff who took part in the ceremony are not separately costed."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. *621*.]

In fact, they were indeed separately costed: Ministers had that document, and they lied to me. I tabled further questions, asking them to confirm that they had received the document. I received a reply confirming that they had received the figure, but the reply did not contain one syllable of apology or regret about the earlier answer.

I have raised these issues with Madam Speaker, and I shall raise them again. I believe that the events occurring in the dying days of this Parliament demean this institution. They attack the integrity of the House and reduce and undermine the role of all Back Benchers. Although we have the authority of our majorities behind us and we speak not only as individuals, our questions have been answered in that manner. We bring matters to the highest forum in the land, but they are treated in a contemptuous and contemptible manner. The Minister did not confess that he had not answered my question according to the Government's instruction to Ministers not to withhold information because it might be politically embarrassing.

My question was about a matter of great concern. The figures reveal that the state opening of Parliament cost approximately three quarters of a million pounds. Some believe that there should be a state opening once per Parliament and not once a year. There have also been indications that the police and many others resent having to provide 1,500 policemen and 1,500 soldiers for it. The ceremony has become increasingly meaningless. This year, for example, the Queen's Speech was found to be of little value because a few hours after it was made the Prime Minister changed it.

The mother of Parliaments is becoming debauched. Recent events have included "Conway-gate" and the resignation of a Minister, who made no act of contrition. We have used the word "dissembling" about that event. We must remember our role as the mother of Parliaments, and that as leaders of the nation we should set an example of morality. As Chaucer said:

"If gold ruste, what shall iren do?"

11.55 am

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I do not wish to follow the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) down the path that he has been treading. However, I should like to follow his colleague, the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), and underscore his plea about Peru. I do so as one whose family members work there and whose cousins were born there. I understand some of its pressures and problems, and also the problem of copycat action around the world.

I should like to say a word of thanks to the Leader of the House. At Business Questions last Thursday, I pressed him on Northern Ireland's omission from the Protection from Harassment Bill. It will now be included by negative resolution.

I believe that the House should not adjourn until it addresses three issues. The first is pressure on residential homes—particularly in Northern Ireland, but also elsewhere. The problem of running the homes is specifically acute in Northern Ireland because the Department of Health and Social Services ultimately holds the purse strings. The point has been bluntly made that in the past 10 years the £260 permitted per week for residents in those homes has not even kept pace with inflation. The tragedy is that statutory homes are allowed more per resident than voluntary or private homes.

Private homes were encouraged to develop, but now they are increasingly being put under strain. The Craigavon trust area, for example, which is responsible for three subsidiary areas, is able to assess and allocate to residential homes only one resident per month. It is also wrong for the Government to rely continually on charitable, voluntary homes to provide care for residents. The reliance is aggravated by the fact that, because of national agreements, auxiliary staff in voluntary homes are paid about 50p less per hour than employees in statutory homes. Staff are trained in voluntary homes, but as soon as there is an opening they move on to better positions in statutory homes, putting more pressure on voluntary homes.

The second issue is more of a constituency matter, concerning the desire of the Sports Council and of the Green Park trust—although the desire has been manifested across the nation—for greater excellence in sportsmanship. The realisation of that goal requires sports medical facilities. I should like to think that the Department of Health in Northern Ireland will help the private sector and those working in the voluntary sector to provide facilities—in a centre for sports medicine, in Musgrave Park hospital, which is part of the Green Park trust—including orthopaedic and physiotherapy care. That is an important objective.

There is a growing belief, which I welcome, that there should be greater participation in sports and that we should raise the standards of our sportsmen. However, injuries occur. That project would provide an opportunity to expand the excellent service already provided by the Gait unit in Musgrave hospital, so that it could serve as a regional centre for excellence for sportsmen and women in Northern Ireland.

My third brief point relates to education. I know that the local management of schools initiative has been going for some time. However, there seem to be differences in its implementation. It appears from information given to me that those schools with fewer than 250 pupils registered are in greater difficulty than the larger schools.

It is a scandal that governors in some schools in Northern Ireland have granted substantial pay increases to principals while the management has had to reduce the number of teaching staff. That will have to be addressed sooner rather than later.

My attention has been drawn to one school in County Down which has not only lost its principal—it was certainly not able to increase his salary—but has now been asked to undertake more work and provide services

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

with a budget already overdrawn by £30,000. The school is being asked to shoulder the increased salary costs of teachers. It is impossible to do that with a deficit budget.

One knock-on effect of that is that rural communities will be disrupted again, with schools being closed by so-called market forces. There will again be a drift from rural communities to the towns. That is not always best, because the harsh reality of life is that, the larger our centres of population, the more the likelihood of growth in deprivation and the development of mischievous incidents. From my experience, larger schools are not necessarily the best, although I attended one that was definitely outstanding. It is important to provide the best education that we can for young people in rural areas. I ask that consideration be given to that cry not just for my constituency, which is urban, but for rural areas throughout Northern Ireland.

12.1 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Given the shortness of the past few speeches, which were models of their kind, there might have been an opportunity for one of the other hon. Members who were in the Chamber earlier to participate. We have not had an overly successful three hours, because the time has not been used as we intended. Three hon. Members—the hon. Members for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), for Basildon (Mr. Amess) and for Castle Point (Dr. Spink)—took 55 minutes between them and raised matters that would be better raised in local government than in the House of Commons.

Having attended many of these debates in the past few years since we changed the procedure, I put it seriously to the Leader of the House that we might consider having a ballot the night before for a mixture of five and 10-minute slots, to be allocated to hon. Members by name, in which they could still raise any subject that they wanted. That would be far better than our current hit and miss procedure, with excessively long early speeches denying many hon. Members the opportunity to raise important matters.

I cannot touch on all the matters that have been raised; nor, I imagine, will the Leader of the House be able to do so. My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) talked about the health service in London, saying that it was trolley time again in London hospitals. I suspect that we shall hear a good deal more about that in the early months of next year, as the winter starts to bite.

My hon. Friend also raised the important issue of Cyprus, mentioning the fact that the Foreign Secretary was able to visit for only 24 hours rather than the 48 hours planned. I am sure that the Leader of the House and his Cabinet colleagues will take note that overseas ministerial visits in 1997 will, of necessity, be a good deal shorter than originally planned. That is not good for the conduct of business or for British interests overseas, but it is a consequence of matters being dealt with in the House. That is the price to be paid. There is a net loss to the country as a whole, but, by and large, people will be prepared to pay that price.

My hon. Friend the Member for North–East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) raised the serious issue of opencast mining, particularly the health hazards of the planned and existing opencast mines in north-east Derbyshire. Ministers will have to address those issues. Clearly, the Leader of the House can only pass them on, but Ministers should take a more proactive view.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) mentioned the events in Peru overnight. We would appreciate any up-to-date information that the Leader of the House has.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) made the model speech of the morning. In five minutes, he raised one issue in a targeted way—the health service in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire and the effects on his constituents. I have no doubt that he will be back on that issue in 1997.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) raised the worrying issue of the accuracy of parliamentary answers. The Leader of the House is not responsible for the inaccurate answers, but the accuracy of answers should concern him more than it does most Cabinet Ministers, because he has a House of Commons role. I should be grateful if he would say something about that.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) talked about the BSE crisis—an issue that we shall keep coming back to in 1997, because the bill will fall to the incoming Government. In particular, he raised matters relating to the cull and the gravy train that is operating to the benefit of a few slaughterhouse owners. That has been alluded to in the past. I have been present for many of the statements in the House. The hon. Gentleman made specific allegations that the taxpayer is not getting value for money. It is clear that, if the rules of local government were applied, Ministers at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food would probably be surcharged for not obtaining value for money by proper competitive tendering arrangements.

Another worrying fact made clear by the hon. Member for North Cornwall—I was not aware of this—is that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who is in charge of the public face of the BSE cull, appears not to be accountable to the House for the management of the operations that he is conducting on behalf of the Government. I do not understand how he has escaped that—probably by offloading and transferring written questions. There ought to be some means of accountability to the House by the Minister responsible for the expenditure of more than £2 billion, rising to £3 billion. As I recall from a previous Red Book, that sum amounts to the entire contingency fund.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the worrying fact that only 21 of the 72 approved slaughterhouses were used for the work, with slightly more being used later. The big boys of the industry have clearly ripped off the taxpayer, with much of the hundreds of millions of pounds of public expenditure going to them in direct profit, while probably hundreds, if not thousands, of small businesses have been destroyed. Looking at the figures in detail, it does not make sense that so much of the public expenditure on dealing with the BSE crisis has lined the pockets of the wrong people, to the tune of hundreds of millions of pounds, while so many small businesses have been destroyed. The issue cannot be dealt with in this morning's debate, but when the bills are picked up in

1997, those accountable for the disaster should be required to pay the price. That price will be in more than pounds, shillings and pence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) raised the issue of the British Rail pension fund robbery, which is what it amounts to, given that £8 billion of assets exceed the liabilities by £1 billion. Such "robbery" has been going on for a long time, and is related not only to privatised industries but to the private sector as a whole.

From some figures in the *Financial Times* this morning, it is clear that the proportion of surpluses being taken by companies is exceeding that returned in benefits to pensioners by a ratio of more than 10:1. If there is inside knowledge or good guesswork on pension fund surpluses, low offers can be submitted for companies—especially those in the public sector—that are put up for sale. Companies are queuing up to pay the Government for up to seven years for the franchise of rail companies, which on the surface does not seem to make sense, because they are laughing all the way to the bank by being able to exploit British Rail pension funds.

Such activity occurs in the private sector, too. Many of my constituents have been affected by Lucas Industries plc raiding the company's pension fund surplus. That company has not paid a penny piece in employers' contributions for years. That is exactly what will happen in the railway industry as companies seek to take a pensions holiday. It is no good anyone saying that the matter rests with the trustees: many of them are quite weak, some turn out to be in the company's pocket and not truly independent, and, although most represent current members who are paying into the fund, they certainly do not represent current pensioners.

The matter will have to be dealt with. I understand that the pensions ombudsman has ordered National Grid to pay £44 million back into the pension fund, which may happen in the rest of the privatised sector. Nevertheless, Ministers should address the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich. If the Leader of the House cannot do so, he should ensure that we get an early and full response from Ministers. There will obviously be investigations—I suspect by the National Audit Office—which will take a long time. It would be very convenient if we could have answers well before the date of the general election is announced so that Ministers can be brought to book for their incompetence in the privatisation of our great national assets.

Although many other hon. Members have spoken, I do not have time to do their speeches justice. I do not think that the debate has been as successful as we could have hoped, due to the abuse of the time for debate by three Conservative Back Benchers.

12.12 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): In the light of some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) and the frustrations expressed earlier in the debate, it is rather ironic that the hon. Gentleman had some minutes more in which to speak than he had asked for and that I shall have nearly 10 minutes more than I had asked for, which should enable me to do more justice than would otherwise have been possible to some of the speeches. I had expected the occasion to be rather more dominated by the Christmas spirit, although we have certainly had the full and varied diet that is associated with Christmas. I shall do my best to digest as much of it as I have time for.

One point raised in several of the early speeches, which I hoped would have been made more often, concerns today's unquestionable seasonal good news about unemployment. Seasonally adjusted claimant unemployment fell today by a record 95,800—down to just over 1.9 million, which is just under 7 per cent. of the work force. I should record that that is the largest monthly fall for 20 years, which brings unemployment down to below 2 million and the total fall since recovery began to more than 1 million.

It is right to make the point that the good news ties in with the outstandingly good report that we received yesterday from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which confirmed that unemployment in the United Kingdom is expected to decline further, and that its unemployment rate over the next two years is expected to be by far the lowest of any major European country and to remain well below the EU average. That is associated with the fact that the OECD expects the United Kingdom to be the fastest growing major European economy this year, next year and in 1998. I was grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) and for Basildon (Mr. Amess) for adverting to those points.

I turn to the speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Castle Point and for Basildon, partly because they referred to the recent good news and partly because they went on to give the House a fairly extensive political and geographical tour of Essex—the county in which I was born and educated and now partly represent. Despite my long association with the county, I learned even more about its geography this morning.

I am obviously tempted, because I am an Essex Member of Parliament, to join in with the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Castle Point and for Basildon. I can certainly confirm that there are many tensions between the Labour and Liberal Democrat groups on Essex county council, as both my hon. Friends said, and that much of the county council's policy seems to leave a lot to be desired. I draw particular attention to some of the actions that it has taken in respect of school transport. I shall not go further down that line, because I would prefer to concentrate on joining both my hon. Friends in expressing pleasure at the grants that were announced this week by the national lottery's charities arm.

I have experienced the very great pleasure of awards being granted to the Halstead day centre, which is not in my constituency but which I know well, and the Tabor centre for physically handicapped adults, in Braintree, with which I have a quite close association. I know how much pleasure has been given by the awards.

I hope that my hon. Friends the Members for Castle Point and for Basildon will forgive me for picking up on their remarks about proposals concerning the fire services in Essex. I should make it clear that, if a fire authority wants to reduce the number of its fire stations, appliances or firefighting posts, it needs the approval of the Home Secretary. So far, my right hon. and learned Friend has not received any application from Essex county council in respect of Canvey Island fire station, and I assure my

[Mr. Tony Newton]

hon. Friends that, should the county council make such an application, he will take account of any representations that he receives in reaching his decision. He has obviously received some representations this morning.

I return to the more logical way of replying to the debate—going through it in order and making such comments as I can. My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter) referred to something for which I have my own enthusiasm: the benefits that his part of the country has experienced from the single regeneration budget announcements earlier this week and from the capital challenge. I was aware of the Lowestoft and the Suffolk Prosper bids to which he referred, because I act as a sort of honorary Minister for eastern England when such announcements are made. Indeed, I gave interviews on them to Radio Norfolk and Radio Suffolk and know how much encouragement they will have given the area. I hope that my hon. Friend will be encouraged to know that east Braintree's regeneration plans were the subject of a successful bid in round 1 of the SRB, and one can already see the transformation on the ground of what was an old industrial part of the town.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) referred to a number of points, but spent most of his speech on poverty. His speech was not as balanced as I would have hoped, even allowing for his political perspective. He failed entirely to acknowledge that the vast majority of people in this country are better off and that, since 1979, average income has risen by more than a third, even after allowing for inflation.

In using figures of the numbers of people on income-related benefit—as if that was some measure of poverty—the hon. Member for Walsall, North did not take any account at all of something about which I know a great deal because I did much work on it while I was Secretary of State for Social Security: in many respects, those figures reflect improvements in the benefit system. There are more people on income-related benefits, due to the huge improvement in the extension of family credit, the introduction of a carers' premium, disability premiums and better and larger premiums for older pensioners. The hon. Gentleman paid no attention to those factors in what I thought was a grossly over-simplified presentation.

Mr. Winnick: Obviously we shall have to agree to disagree about that, but when I say that the bottom 10th of the population as regards income are 17 per cent. worse off in absolute terms than in 1979, is the right hon. Gentleman really telling me that he disputes that? That is an important figure, as are the other figures that I gave about people living in poverty; I notice that he has not commented on those.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman put great weight on what I regard as very over-simplified statistics, in an over-simplified presentation. I have given some pretty compelling reasons to support my belief that it was oversimplified. Obviously, we do not have time for an extended debate on the details of all the statistics, but I have made my point and I cleave to it.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) was one of a number of hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) and the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Perry Barr, who mentioned parliamentary questions. I take a close interest in that matter, and as it happens, the hon. Lady, who appears to have left her seat, has recently written—

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am here.

Mr. Newton: She is a peripatetic hon. Lady, and has now appeared in what for her is a rather unusual part of the Chamber. Perhaps she is practising to be part of the gang that sits on the Opposition Bench below the Gangway. None the less, I am glad to see her in her place.

The hon. Lady, among others, made some remarks about parliamentary questions. I shall consider with great care what was said, including what the hon. Member for Newport, West said about the State Opening of Parliament. The hon. Lady has written to me recently about related matters, and I am considering those, but it may be appropriate if my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster replies, because he was in charge of the exercise that led to the publication of clearer guidelines on answering parliamentary questions. Of course, I always take the hon. Lady's comments seriously.

I accept that, as the hon. Lady said, there is a tendency for a flood of questions to be answered on the last day before a recess, but I think that the hon. Lady is being unduly cynical about the reasons that she attributed for that.

Part of the problem is caused by the huge increase in the volume of parliamentary questions asked, and by the pressure from hon. Members, who sometimes table questions at a late stage before a recess, not to mention the pressure within Departments to publish answers more quickly than they otherwise would. If questions are not answered today, they cannot be answered until 13 January, and if they were left until then, Departments would be criticised for that reason instead. I hope that the hon. Lady will at least acknowledge that point.

The main thrust of the hon. Lady's speech, which was added to by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and to some degree by the hon. Member for Perry Barr, concerned railway pensions. Hon. Members will have observed that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport not only heard her remarks but has come into the Chamber to hear mine, having had a word with me in the intervening period. I can therefore assure the hon. Lady that my right hon. Friend has taken note of what she said, although I hope that he will not mind my saying that some of his comments on it were less than flattering.

I must make it clear that the position regarding British Rail pensioners' rights will be no less favourable as a result of privatisation. The new arrangements replicate as far as possible those in place under BR, and include safeguards governing the use of surpluses. It is in the nature of a scheme funded jointly by employers and employees—60 per cent. is paid by the one and 40 per cent. by the other—that, when surpluses occur, they should be shared.

I went through a similar argument in a previous capacity when I was the Minister responsible for occupational pensions. In general terms, the topic has

been the subject of endless argument over the years, and there has been fresh legislation. I suspect that were a deficit to emerge, the hon. Lady would be the first to demand that the employers find the money to fill it. There must be some balance between the two.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I understand what the right hon. Gentleman is saying, but the Government have written in so many exemptions for the private companies that there is no doubt that they would expect other people to support any deficit that appeared. My point is simpler than that: they are taking money to which they are not entitled, and they will make darn sure that they do not pay for any deficits.

Mr. Newton: As my time is now diminishing by the minute, I cannot say more to the hon. Lady than that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has listened to what she has said—although I must admit that I could hear him uttering dissenting noises from a sedentary position. I am sure that he will come back to her on the subject if he feels it appropriate.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) continued what I acknowledge has been a long and vigorously fought campaign on matters related to BSE. He, probably more than almost anyone else, will be aware that the House had an extensive opportunity, if not to debate the matter, at least to question the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about BSE-related matters after his statement on Monday. Clearly I cannot go over all the ground again in a short speech.

I managed to follow the hon. Gentleman's speech from afar, although I was not in the Chamber at the time, and it struck me as, to put it mildly, somewhat tendentious. Much of what he said was based on 20:20 hindsight. Whatever the genesis of the 30-months scheme may have been, it was undoubtedly supported by the National Farmers Union, partly because farmers recognised that they would not sell any beef from animals older than 30 months unless something along those lines was done.

The hon. Gentleman might have acknowledged the fact that the result of the scheme was an increase in consumer confidence in the British market substantially more rapid than occurred in many other countries in Europe, and that that brought advantage to the British industry.

Mr. Tyler: Can the right hon. Gentleman give one assurance to the House—that, if the Public Accounts Committee and the National Audit Office wished to go through the books and see exactly what happened, the Government would co-operate fully?

Mr. Newton: Of course the Government will always co-operate with properly constituted bodies of that kind. Beyond that, these are not matters on which I can comment off the cuff on the Floor of the House this morning. None the less, I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman's remarks are drawn to the attention of the appropriate Ministers.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has been criticised in some respects—in my view, unfairly. In relation to the BSE culling arrangements, he is in the same position as I am on a range of other matters—that of chairing a Cabinet Committee or a co-ordinating group of Ministers. Executive responsibility remains with those Ministers. A co-ordinating arrangement is necessary, because many Departments are involved. We have four Departments responsible for agriculture, and other Departments have a strong interest in the issue too. The criticisms of my right hon. Friend, who has been assiduous and has done an effective job, are therefore unreasonable and unfair.

I am coming to the end of the time allowed, and I should comment briefly on what was said by the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), without whom no debate of this nature would be complete these days. He made a traditional "Tooting speech", starting with hospitals and ending with Cyprus. I noted carefully what he said, and shall ensure that it is drawn to the attention of the appropriate Ministers.

I cannot comment on everything said by the hon. Member for Linlithgow, who made a characteristic speech—I mean that as a compliment, not as some sort of disguised insult. The latest information that I have on the incident in Lima, which is not as complete as I would like, is that it is possible that some British nationals are in the residence. I cannot say more at this stage. The United Kingdom is in close touch with the Peruvian authorities, and we understand that negotiations are under way. We shall of course pass on any further information at the earliest opportunity, as it emerges.

I do not think that the hon. Member for North–East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) would expect me to comment in detail on the points that he made in an excellent constituency speech. I shall ensure that they are drawn to the attention of those of my hon. Friends who are concerned with such matters in detail, just as I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to what was said by the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping).

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) for the words of thanks that he expressed for the action that we took to enable the Protection from Harassment Bill to extend to Northern Ireland. I take note of the fact that he took the trouble to acknowledge that; we were glad to be able to meet him in that respect.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) told me that he wanted me to take note of what he said rather than to comment extensively on it. As he also told me that he would not be able to be here for my winding-up speech, I shall make little further comment, other than to say that I have several points that I think he would find encouraging, and I shall try to communicate them to him in other ways.

Those points include the fact that a public inquiry into the statutory orders needed for the Northfleet bypass scheme will be held before mid-April 1997. I understand that there has been much frustration among the scheme's supporters about delays in progress on that important matter. However, as my hon. Friend acknowledged, those delays have not been of the Government's making.

Because of the slightly unexpected additional time that I had, I have been able to comment on almost every speech. I hope that my comments will enable hon. Members to depart at least slightly happier than when they arrived and that they all, including you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will have the sort of relaxed and enjoyable Christmas that I am sure they all—or at least some of them—deserve.

Nigeria

12.29 pm

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): I thank the Minister for agreeing to an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser), who has a long record of support for the Nigerian democratic movement, with especially close links to the Nigerian Organisation for Democracy with Integrity. I am also pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd), who has led Labour's campaign against the Nigerian military dictatorship.

Three and a half years ago, on Saturday 12 June 1993, in a jungle clearing south of Benin City, I observed the people of the township of Nikrogha voting in the Nigerian presidential election. Voting was orderly and conducted in a spirit of optimism, and procedures were entirely correct. On the same day, 14 million other Nigerians voted. The turnout was variable, but, as hundreds of international observers and thousands of Nigerian election monitors universally reported, the vote was free and fair.

Chief Moshood Abiola was the unquestionable democratic winner, with majorities across all regions—a genuinely unifying and national mandate for his presidency. We are all familiar with the sequence of events that followed: the annulment of the elections by the then military dictator, Babangida, to nationwide protests; and the assumption of power shortly afterwards by the current military dictator, Abacha, who proceeded to ban political parties, dismantle the existing democratic structures—including state and federal legislatures—and replace civilian state governors with military administrators.

Resistance to the military regime continued. In May 1994, the National Democratic Coalition, NADECO, was created. Soon afterwards, the national assembly reconvened to declare the Abacha Government illegal. In June 1994, Abiola returned to claim his presidency. His arrest on 23 June provoked nationwide strikes led by petroleum workers. In associated demonstrations, hundreds of people were gunned down. Abiola and Frank Ovie Kokori, the leader of the petroleum workers, have remained in detention since 1994.

Bizarrely, even the so-called constitutional conference, set up by Abacha to implement his transition programme and largely appointed by the military, voted in December to end military rule by 1 January 1996, a recommendation that was subsequently reversed after the arrest of the originator of the proposal, Shehu Musa Yar'adua. Wherever and whenever they have had the opportunity, Nigerians have always chosen the path of democracy. It is our duty as democrats to support them in that demand.

Just over a year ago, the world was horrified by the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni leaders in an act described by our Prime Minister as judicial murder. Nineteen Ogonis remain on trial for murder in connection with the same facts and before the same so-called civil disturbances special tribunal that convicted Saro-Wiwa and his co-defendants. That execution is the most extreme and best-known example of the military regime's open contempt for human rights.

The authorities in Nigeria continue to resort to arbitrary detention of prisoners of conscience, ignoring court orders whenever it suits them. Political prisoners continue to face the prospect of unfair trials by special tribunals with the power to impose the death sentence. Detainees continue to be denied access to lawyers, families and essential medical treatment. There are continuing allegations of extra-judicial executions by Nigerian law enforcement officials.

In June and July 1995, former Head of State General Olusegun Obasanjo, Shehu Musa Yar'adua, and 41 other individuals were tried in secret before a military tribunal on charges of plotting a coup against the military Government. They were denied legal representation of their choice, and there was no appeal procedure. Many Nigerians believe that the charges were simply a device to remove military officers and others who posed a threat Abacha's hold on power.

Also swept up in the charges were Dr. Beko Ransome-Kuti, the chairman of the Campaign for Democracy, and four journalists—Christine Anyanwu, Kunle Ajibade, George Mbah, and Ben Charles Obi—whose guilt consisted solely of publishing articles commenting on the trial. Amnesty International believes that all the so-called coup plotters are prisoners of conscience.

There is a strong suspicion that the regime is resorting to political assassination to supplement its manipulation of the judicial system. In October 1995, Pa Alfred Rewane, a major supporter of the National Democratic Coalition, was shot dead in Lagos in a hail of bullets. In early 1996, Alex Ibru, publisher of the liberal newspaper *The Guardian*, was the subject of an attempted assassination.

On 4 June 1996, Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, senior wife of Chief Abiola and the principal campaigner on her husband's behalf, was murdered in Lagos, in circumstances that have led many to fear that her assassination may have been carried out by Government agents, acting with or without the knowledge of the central authorities. The Government have failed to initiate an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation of her killing.

Apologists for the regime sometimes claim that dissidence is not widespread in Nigeria, and that there is little evidence of internal dissent. It has been aptly remarked that, if dissent is limited, it is the silence of the graveyard. Meanwhile, the Abacha regime has announced its own leisurely programme of transition to democracy, designed to culminate in the swearing in of a newly elected president on 1 October 1998. The programme bears an uncanny resemblance to the abortive Babangida transition programme, and has already been marked by a travesty of local government elections earlier this year and a process of party formation in which none of the parties have managed to meet the Government guidelines.

We cannot leave the transition to democracy in the hands of the military junta. The regime has no democratic legitimacy, and the transition to democracy can have no credibility unless it is carried out in a climate of genuine democratic participation and observation of human rights.

The demands on the regime are clear: the release of all political prisoners and credible guarantees that free and fair elections will go ahead as soon as possible, and well before the proposed date of 1998. It is equally clear that exhortation alone will not persuade the generals. The international community will have to ratchet up its pressure on the Nigerian regime to secure those

objectives. That will mean readiness to deploy sanctions beyond those already applied in the aftermath of the Ken Saro-Wiwa execution last November.

The extra sanctions have been well ventilated and were recommended for consideration by the United States, the European Union and the Commonwealth by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group after its second meeting in April this year. It recommended a ban on air links and additional economic measures, including the freezing of the financial assets and bank accounts in foreign countries of members of the regime and their families. They have been backed by members of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, such as New Zealand and Jamaica, and have been unilaterally imposed by Canada. The virtue of those measures is that they target members of the regime and the elites that sustain it, without increasing the suffering of the population in general.

Britain's historic and cultural links with Nigeria, not least our key role in its economy, make it natural that we should take the lead in renewed international pressure against the regime. The British Government must use their status as the foremost partner in the Commonwealth to co-ordinate a clear and consistent strategy against Abacha and his cohorts. We have the machinery in the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, of which we are a member, to enable us to act now.

There is widespread suspicion that Britain has so far exerted its influence to retard effective international action against the generals. I hope that the Minister will reassure us that that is not so. In any case, we do not have long to wait for the election of a Labour Government, who will be whole-heartedly committed to the restoration of human rights and democracy in Nigeria.

12.40 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) for allowing me a few moments to intervene.

We are both sponsors of the Nigerian Organisation for Democracy with Integrity, which is based in the United Kingdom. It is not the only organisation in Britain, the United States or in other countries outside Nigeria that is campaigning vigorously for the restoration of respect for human rights and public integrity in that country. I hope that the Nigerian authorities are aware of the depth of feeling about conditions in that country, not just among Nigerians in that country but among those abroad and their friends and allies, among whom I hope that we can number everyone in the House today.

It is a tragedy that Nigeria should be saddled with a dictatorship, violence and corruption, not least because of its great natural resources of oil and in agriculture. The natural appetite of its people for education means that they are well adapted to move forward in the world, so it is also a tragedy that a country that should be leading Africa is so far down the league and kept there by the corruption of its current leaders and their dictatorial system.

In common with my hon. Friend, I ask for an announcement from the Government to the effect that further pressure will be applied by the international community, not least by the Commonwealth, to encourage a return to civilian rule and the restoration of respect for human rights and public integrity. The truth is that democracy will not work successfully in Nigeria unless its society is free of corruption and respects public institutions and the rights of its ordinary people.

I agree with my hon. Friend that the time has come to intensify those pressures. One of the most dramatic reasons for that, although not the only one, was supplied to me in a letter from the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department about constituents, in which he spoke of

> "concerns about the lack of progress towards civilian democratic rule for Nigeria, and the human rights record there, including the appalling executions of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a minority rights activist, and eight of his associates following a flawed judicial process."

Those are not my words, but those of a Home Office Minister, yet nothing has been done to redeem the situation created by the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his fellow Ogonis. No apology has been forthcoming. Nineteen other members of the Ogoni tribe have been kept in detention without trial since 1994. When one recalls what happened to Ken Saro-Wiwa, perhaps we should not press for those people to be brought to trial. We should, however, argue that those people, who have been kept imprisoned without trial for two years and have not been subject to any proper judicial process, should be released.

The second reason for intensifying our pressure on Nigeria is General Abacha's attitude. Although he says that he wants a transition to civilian rule and wants to encourage the creation of political parties, they are nothing more than sweetheart parties, because the only effective opposition there is the Nigerian Democratic Coalition—NADECO. When its representatives campaign, however, their offices are raided, they are arrested, and they are not allowed to participate in elections.

As my hon. Friend said, political assassinations continue, and I can add to his list the death of Dr. Shola Adeshola, who was recently killed by a car bomb when driving. That bomb was believed to be intended for his brother, who is a leading member of NADECO in Nigeria.

No political prisoners have been released, and the 2,000 Ogoni people who were dispersed from the River State have not been encouraged to return to it. The wasteland created as a result of oil exploitation has not benefited from any major environmental rehabilitation. The only plan seems to be to try to civilianise the dictatorship rather than return Nigeria to a democracy.

The time has come for the international community to apply more pressure and to turn the screw. Nigeria is tragically falling behind because of the regime that has been allowed to continue there. We have many Nigerian friends in this country, and we hope to hear the Minister announce plans to intensify pressure to ensure that the restoration of respect for human rights and democracy will at long last come about.

12.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Dr. Liam Fox): I congratulate the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) on obtaining the debate, and I welcome the fact that he chose such an important topic. I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) not only for his contribution, but for his extreme courtesy in getting his timing so impeccably correct.

[Dr. Liam Fox]

I should like to start by discussing the actions of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, which, if the House will forgive me, I will refer to as CMAG for the rest of the debate.

The group's representatives visited Nigeria on 18 to 20 November to continue their assessment of Nigeria's adherence to the Harare principles of good governance, as mandated by the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Auckland last year. I remind the House exactly of the Harare principles, which place particular emphasis on

"the protection and promotion of the fundamental political values of the Commonwealth"—

which are defined as democracy; democratic processes and institutions; the rule of law and the independence of judiciary; just and honest government; and fundamental human rights. The hon. Members spoke about all those issues.

My right hon. Friend Baroness Chalker represented the United Kingdom at that meeting, and, far from retarding progress on those issues, she has been an important member of the group, and represents the Government and the country in pushing the process forward. I know that her commitment to reform in Nigeria is without doubt.

Sadly, the Canadian delegation was unable to participate in the visit, as Nigeria refused to issue visas to two security officers who were due to travel with the Canadian Minister. That is indicative of the sort of problem that we still face in our current negotiations.

I should also report that the Nigerians pressed once again, not surprisingly, for Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth to be rescinded; for CMAG to support the transitional programme; for all sanctions to be lifted; and for the resumption of high-level dialogue. There are quite a few conditions that must be met before that can be achieved.

In addition to the Nigerian delegation, CMAG met representatives of the National Electoral Commission and the transitional committees, as well as the leaders of the five recently registered political parties, traditional rulers and the chairman of the Nigerian Human Rights Commission. The group also had an audience with General Abacha, but was not able to see Chief Abiola, General Obasanjo or any other political prisoners. Baroness Chalker met representatives of the human rights and pro-democracy groups in the margins of the visit.

I am pleased to report that the Nigerians released three high-profile political prisoners during the visit: Femi Falana, Gani Fawehinmi and Femi Aborishade. Like CMAG, I welcome their release, but I want to make it clear to the House that is not nearly enough. The group pressed for the prompt restoration of accountable civilian government; the immediate release of all political prisoners, including Chief Abiola; the rapid resolution of the case of the 19 Ogonis who face the same charges as Ken Saro-Wiwa and his associates; and a review of prison conditions. All those conditions must be met.

The Nigerians were questioned in detail about the implementation of the transition timetable, including the delay in promulgating the draft constitution and the opportunities for unregistered parties to participate in the process, which we regard as an important, not a nominal, part of any proper democratic process. In addition, they were questioned about the mechanisms for conducting the local elections that are scheduled to take place this month.

The Nigerians assured the group that the transition was on track, although they said, in their terms, that they did not believe that it was logistically possible to conduct the local elections this month. If there are logistical reasons for their not being carried out this month, we hope that they are carried out as soon as is practicably possible, because it is not acceptable for logistics to be given as a reason for a delay in implementing proper democratic reforms.

The majority of those to whom CMAG spoke, both those in the Government and others, expressed confidence in the transition process. The group was also informed that most of the politicians whose associations had not registered in September had now joined one of the five registered parties.

The group also expressed its deep concern about the lack of respect for the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, and the use of rule by decree, which concentrates power in the hands of the regime. The group requested clarification on several decrees that impinged on fundamental rights. Not surprisingly, the Nigerian side responded only that rule by decree was not unusual in military regimes. That practice must change.

CMAG made it clear to the Nigerian authorities that it expects the Ogoni Nineteen to be released or brought before a properly constituted court that respects the basic legal rights of the defendant. It also pointed out that any further trials by the same tribunal that tried Ken Saro-Wiwa would provoke a strong international reaction. The group also called again for the Nigerians to receive and to co-operate fully with the visit by the two United Nations Commission on Human Rights thematic rapporteurs.

The hon. Member for Streatham mentioned Amnesty International's recent report. The Government welcome that report and the 10-point programme for human rights reform in Nigeria. Those useful documents were circulated to all members of CMAG before the visit. The group handed a copy of both documents to the Nigerians in Abuja for their urgent attention and, more important, for their response, which we await with interest.

What will be the next steps? CMAG will meet again in the new year to consider the material it received during the visit, and to agree on next steps in preparation for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Edinburgh next October. We hope that that meeting will also hear submissions from key Nigerian opposition groups in exile and relevant international non-governmental organisations.

We shall be working towards a fair assessment that reflects the wide range of views that CMAG has heard since it began its assessment last December. It is too early to comment on CMAG's recommendations for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting next year, but it is clear that Nigeria is still in breach of the principles set out in the Harare declaration, and Nigeria's suspension will have to be considered in that context.

I am pleased to inform the House that the United Kingdom co-sponsored another critical resolution that was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 12 December. The resolution criticises Nigeria's human rights record, and calls on it to implement all the recommendations contained the UN fact-finding mission's report.

The resolution also recognises the important work being done by CMAG, and calls for continued co-operation between the Commonwealth and the United Nations. Such co-operation is an issue that is and should be important to the entire international community. The greater the level of co-operation between the UN, CMAG, the European Union and individual Governments, the better. The European Union has rolled over its common position on Nigeria, which means that all EU measures introduced at the end of last year remain firmly in place.

All those decisions combine to send a clear message to the Nigerians that the international community remains resolved and is working together to keep up the pressure on Abacha and his regime to restore human rights and democracy.

The hon. Gentleman asked several questions about where we go from here, and I should like to take those one by one. First, there is the question of further Commonwealth sanctions. The Commonwealth has already taken the significant step of suspending Nigeria's membership of the association. No other organisation has taken that step, so it is important in itself.

CMAG's mandate is to assess Nigeria's adherence to the Harare principles and to make recommendations to the Commonwealth Heads of Government—CMAG is not a sanction-making body. The April package of measures remains on the table, and CMAG has not yet recommended its implementation to the Heads of Government, but we await any decision on that.

The United Kingdom, together with the European Union, has had measures in place since July 1993, and they were reinforced by adoption measures by means of EU common positions on 20 November 1995 and 4 December 1995. Our aim is to identify carefully targeted measures that will be effective and send a clear signal of our concerns to the regime without wrecking the Nigerian economy, and without imposing any more hardship on its 100 million people than is required to achieve our political objectives.

Mr. Keith Hill *indicated assent.*

Dr. Fox: I see the hon. Gentleman nodding—he understands that it is most difficult to achieve the right balance when any form of sanction is being used to try to achieve political ends.

The full list of EU measures is now suspension of non-essential high-level visits in both directions; suspension of military training; an EU-wide arms ban; visa restrictions; the suspension of development co-operation except for projects in support of human rights and democracy and those concentrating on poverty alleviation; the withdrawal of all military personnel attached to diplomatic representations of EU member states in Nigeria and the expulsion of military personnel attached to Nigerian diplomatic representations in member states; and an interruption of sporting contacts through the denial of visas for official delegations and national teams.

We have noted calls for further economic sanctions, including the severing of trade links, an oil embargo and an assets freeze. In our view, those would require a UN Security Council resolution to be effective, and an oil embargo would, in addition, have to be implemented through a naval blockade. We judge such sanctions to be, in practice, unachievable at present.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned an air links ban, but, again, we believe that that would be effective only if applied unanimously by the whole international community. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary has made it clear that the UK is not prepared to support an air links ban unless it is supported by all its European and Commonwealth partners.

The issue of defence exports is often raised. On 11 November 1995, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced a full UK arms embargo against the Nigerian military, and on 20 November the European Union adopted a common position that extended measures in force since June 1993 to include a full EU-wide arms ban. The restrictions now in place include all military, security and paramilitary goods and arms, ammunition and related material. The rules do not distinguish between items intended for the military and those intended for the police; nor will any exception be allowed for international peacekeeping operations in which the Nigerians might be involved. Sometimes there is confusion on that last point.

I should like to speak on one subject that the hon. Gentleman did not mention—our position on aid and the UK aid programme. Development co-operation is suspended, except for projects in support of human rights and democracy and those concentrating on poverty alleviation.

The UK adheres strictly to the EU common position, being confined to projects bringing direct benefits to poor Nigerians in health, population, water, basic education and small-scale agriculture, using non-military channels such as non-government organisations. Our bilateral expenditure has inevitably dropped from £12 million in 1992-93 to £4.8 million in 1995-96, but it is starting to increase again this year as our new sector programmes develop.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Streatham for initiating the debate and giving me the chance to clarify some of the points that he raised. The Government take the issue extremely seriously. The present Conservative Government are fully committed to democracy, the rule of law, human rights and sustainable development for all the peoples of Nigeria.

Ecclesiastical Heritage

1 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak briefly about one of my favourite subjects. Almost the first thing that I did when I entered the House was to begin moves to introduce a Bill to make public funds available for ecclesiastical buildings in use, because until 1977 they were not.

I am delighted that my campaign met with some success. I joined and was joined by many others. For almost 20 years, the Church of England especially has had cause to be grateful for the funds that have come its way. I say that to emphasise the fact that this is not a carping speech. I hope that I shall say some important things about the preservation of England's churches and cathedrals. I mean no insult to anyone, present or not present, by concentrating on Church of England buildings, because the problem of historic churches is essentially a Church of England problem.

The Church of England has about 16,000 churches, about 13,000 of which are listed buildings, and of course it has 42 cathedrals. Forty per cent. of grade 1 listed buildings in England are ecclesiastical.

It is an appropriate time to talk about churches and cathedrals, to which I hope people throughout the country will flock next Wednesday, which is Christmas day. They will be fuller then than probably at any other time of the year—fuller than most of them will be at Easter. That draws attention to the use of our places of worship.

Many of those who do not choose to go to church next week nevertheless recognise the central importance of the church. In most towns and villages, the church is the most important public building, almost always the most outstanding architecturally and the one with the most interesting history. If one believes, as I do, that one comes closest to the soul and the spirit of a nation in its historic buildings, one recognises the central importance of our churches and cathedrals.

I am glad to see my friend, the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), in the Chamber. I apologise to him for the fact that I shall not speak about Scottish churches today, but he takes a well-informed interest in all heritage matters and it is always good to see him in our debates.

A month ago today, the Archbishop of Canterbury launched an initiative with a press conference at Lambeth palace. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of National Heritage is well aware of that. I am glad that he will reply to the debate; he is one of my oldest friends in the House, and no one could question his commitment to the civilised things of life.

The archbishop's initiative, which is encapsulated in the document that I hold in my hand, entitled "Developing the Partnership between Church and State over the Ecclesiastical Heritage", is concerned with developing and strengthening that partnership. I emphasise the word "partnership". After all, we are speaking of our national, established Church—the Church whose services and ministrations are available for every man, woman and child in England, and which therefore has enormously important commitments of mission and worship.

No sensible cleric regards our great, rich legacy of historic churches as anything other than a wonderful asset. One has only to think of some of one's favourite churches to recognise the transcendant beauty of such buildings. I think of my native Lincolnshire, which I left many years ago: of churches as glorious as Louth, Boston and Stow and of little gems such as Snarford. In my adopted county of Staffordshire, in the diocese of Lichfield, I think especially of my parish church at Enville, where I am churchwarden and where, during the past few years, we have struggled to raise about £110,000 to maintain our church.

That says it all, in a way. We have a population of fewer than 400. There is a similar number on the electoral roll. We have received, and are grateful for, state aid, and we have received aid from the Historic Churches Preservation Trust, of which I happen to be a trustee. Nevertheless, we have had to raise a very large sum ourselves. We have done it, and it has brought the community together. We welcomed the challenge, but we would not welcome another one next year because there is a limit to the amount of money that small communities can raise, and a recognition of that is at the heart of the archbishop's commendable initiative.

It is calculated that it costs about £100 million a year to maintain the fabric of the churches and cathedrals of the Church of England. About 75 per cent. of that comes from the Church and from voluntary giving and fund raising, and 25 per cent. comes from grant and lottery money. Welcome as grants are, the sum received from English Heritage is about £11 million—about £5 million less than the VAT that the Church pays on repairs. Every Minister should ponder that figure.

If we are to continue to be regarded as a civilised nation, the Government have a responsibility to ensure that the greatest buildings in our country are properly maintained. At the moment, most of our churches and cathedrals are in good repair. As the archbishop said when he launched his document a month ago, in very many cases they have never been in better repair. Yet, looking into the next century and beyond, one must recognise that the continuing burden will be too much for the Church and congregations effectively to discharge unless more help is given.

Today, I am appealing for a recognition of that fact, and of other facts too. The lottery money is certainly welcome, although there are certain reservations about it in Church quarters—reservations that I can well understand. Still, the money has been welcomed by the Archbishop and by those who have the care of our churches, but it is not enough. We are, after all, asking for only a very small sum of money. The budget of English Heritage is being cut. We need more funding from that source, but English Heritage cannot provide more core funding if its resources are being cut.

The Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for National Heritage and other Ministers have said repeatedly that the lottery money is regarded as additional to Government money, stressing time and again that it is never to be seen as a substitute for Government funding, but it is becoming a substitute. Later today we shall have an opportunity to debate the Second Reading of the National Heritage Bill, and if I am fortunate enough to catch the Speaker's eye, I may be able to develop some of those arguments then. For now, I merely put down a marker. Ministers must face up to the facts of Government funding; we need more core funding from English Heritage.

We also need money to compensate for the £16 million that the Church pays out in VAT. Perhaps it will be possible to negotiate with Brussels a better rate of VAT on repairs to listed buildings throughout the Community. Perhaps also we might take another look at differing rates of VAT in this country. After all, by decision of the House, the VAT rate on fuel is already 8 per cent. Why not an 8 per cent. rate in this case too?

We also need more money for the Churches Conservation Trust, the body that used to be called the Redundant Churches Fund, which maintains the fabric of churches that are no longer regularly used for worship but are of architectural or historic importance. Those churches, vested in Church and state, will need, we calculate, about £3.3 million more if they are to be effectively maintained over the next three years. The same money could buy only a very small bit of a bypass or motorway.

Next year, we shall commemorate the 1,400th anniversary of the arrival of St. Augustine, in 597. Two years after that, we shall begin to celebrate the millennium. People often forget when they talk glibly of the millennium that it is the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of our Lord. There is surely no more fitting way to commemorate the millennium than by guaranteeing the churches and cathedrals of this land the necessary funding to take them through to the next century and beyond.

I am talking about a matter of £5 million a year extra; that would take care of most of the points mentioned by the Archbishop in his press conference. Set in the national context, that is a tiny sum, yet it will ensure that some of the greatest buildings, not just in this country but in Europe, are secure for the future. That is what the debate is all about: making sure that our churches and cathedrals remain the focal points of our towns and villages and of many a wonderful rural landscape. Although congregations will still have a responsibility, they will be able to devote more energy and resources to the other tasks confronting the Church. Bearing in mind the state of our society today, I submit that there never was a time when there was more need for the Christian message to be heeded.

I ask the Minister once again to heed my plea today. I hope that he will not just tell me what has already been done, because I recognise that with gratitude. I hope that he will tell me that more is going to be done and that it is recognised that more must be done if we are to keep faith with our Christian heritage.

1.15 pm

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) on his success in securing this short debate. He brings to our heritage, especially our ecclesiastic heritage, not just immense expertise but the sort of passionate commitment that has been on display again this morning. I shall try to explain what can be done and how matters can be taken forward, but, especially for the sake of those who will read the debate, I should also like to put the subject in context by touching on what has already been done. I understand, nevertheless, that my hon. Friend wants to take matters beyond that.

I certainly agree that historic religious buildings stand at the very heart of our national heritage. As my hon. Friend said, it is estimated that nearly 15,000 listed buildings are in religious use, 13,000 of them churches of the Church of England. Of the buildings listed grade I—the top grade, representing only 2 per cent. of all listed buildings—well over a third are Anglican parish churches.

The importance of the ecclesiastical heritage lies not merely in its prodigious quantity but in its astonishing richness and diversity. It reflects every phase in the history of architecture from Saxon times up to the present century. It encompasses buildings of every size and style, from tiny mediaeval churches in remote countryside areas to huge Victorian masterpieces in the inner cities; from nonconformist chapels to the great Anglican cathedrals. It offers countless examples of artistic and technical achievement, and it attracts millions of visitors every year from home and abroad.

Moreover, we appreciate those buildings for more than their intrinsic architectural and artistic qualities. We value the unique contribution that they make to the appearance of the countryside and the townscape. At a deeper level, we are aware of their role in the development of communities and of the nation. We acknowledge their significance as enduring symbols of religious faith through the centuries.

The Government are totally committed to preserving the ecclesiastical heritage in all its fullness. That commitment extends to the historic buildings of all religious denominations and faiths. I well recognise, however, that in initiating this debate my hon. Friend has a particular concern for the buildings of the Church of England. I shall therefore concentrate on that aspect when responding to him.

As my hon. Friend has pointed out, it has long been accepted that care of the Church of England's heritage involves a partnership between the Church itself and the state. Such a partnership has in fact existed for many years, and has achieved remarkable results. The credit for that can be shared equally between both partners. The Church of England has an excellent record in looking after its historic buildings. I readily accept that caring for those buildings and their contents is a heavy responsibility, much of which must be borne by churchgoers themselves.

Therefore, I am very glad to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all those individual congregations who do so much to preserve that outstanding part of the nation's heritage, not least my hon. Friend's village church. For a population of 400 to raise more than £100,000 is an achievement, and I can see why my hon. Friend would not like to go through the process again next year. I congratulate him, in his role as church warden, and the other members of the congregation on that remarkable achievement.

For the past 20 years, Government funding has been available to assist with the repair and maintenance of historic church buildings. Such funding is today channelled through English Heritage. During the past five years, English Heritage has provided grant funding of £61.4 million for repairs to churches and cathedrals, the vast majority of them Anglican. During the current financial year, English Heritage expects to make some 300 grant offers, at a total value of £13 million, for church and cathedral repair schemes. Some 80 per cent. of the grants will be for Anglican buildings. Normally, only churches listed grade 1 or grade 2-star are eligible, but all applications, including those for grade 2 churches, are considered on their merits. The criteria for the award of

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grant are the historic importance of the building, the urgency of the proposed repairs, and the need for financial support.

The national lottery has now firmly established itself as a further key instrument for securing the future of the ecclesiastical heritage. Already, the heritage lottery fund has made 124 grant awards, totalling £14.5 million, for schemes relating to religious buildings. I understand that 105 of those awards have been for Anglican churches. Unlike English Heritage grants, which are geared towards the maintenance and repair of the fabric of historic churches, lottery funding is able to support a much wider range of projects. For example, a considerable number of lottery awards have been made for the restoration of church monuments, organs and bells. A further important difference is that lottery funding can be offered for unlisted churches in conservation areas and redundant churches.

As the House may be aware, in October, the heritage lottery fund and English Heritage launched an important new joint scheme for funding repairs to churches in use. That will pool lottery and English Heritage resources to create one source of funding. English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund have each set aside £10 million for the scheme during its first year. That will enable available resources to be deployed more effectively and to reach a wider range of church buildings, thereby ensuring that more local communities benefit from lottery grants.

The scheme offers a simplified one-stop application process and will allow English Heritage and the heritage lottery fund to deal with applications more efficiently and quickly. It will provide them with a clearer overall picture of the requirements of churches, thus allowing them to assess individual needs more accurately and to target grants more effectively, but I should emphasise that church organisations or congregations that do not wish to seek lottery funding on moral grounds will still be free to apply only for English Heritage support.

A further expression of the partnership between Church and state is the continued commitment on both sides to the support of the Churches Conservation Trust. The trust is devoted to the repair and maintenance of outstanding Anglican churches that are no longer required for pastoral purposes and for which no suitable alternative use can be found. There are currently more than 300 churches in the care of the trust. Since 1995, the trust has been fortunate to have my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) as its chairman.

The major financial supporter of the Churches Conservation Trust are the Government, who contribute 70 per cent. of the trust's costs, the Church Commissioners providing the remaining 30 per cent. Over the three years from 1994 to 1997, financial provision for the trust has totalled £10.3 million, of which £7.2 million has come from the Government and £3.1 million from the Church Commissioners. Funding for the period 1997 to 2000 has been provisionally agreed at £10.6 million, comprising £7.4 million from the Government and £3.2 million from the Church Commissioners.

The level of funding is intended to enable the trust to keep its churches in a decent state of repair and to allow it to take on a limited number of additional churches. If the trust did not exist, many of those outstanding historic churches would face neglect, damaging alterations or even demolition. As it is, the buildings are maintained in sound condition, remain a focus in their localities and are accessible to the public.

I will also mention the Government's support for the work of the Historic Chapels Trust. The trust was set up in 1993 to acquire outstanding non-Anglican religious buildings—Roman Catholic churches, nonconformist chapels, synagogues and so on—which are no longer needed for worship. In effect, the trust aims to perform for such buildings a similar role to that undertaken by the Churches Conservation Trust.

The establishment of the Historic Chapels Trust was aided by financial support from the Government. The trust is currently funded via English Heritage grant and through private sponsorship. My Department is at present considering an application from the trust for financial support from the heritage grant fund. So far, the trust has acquired six buildings and is negotiating to acquire eight more.

Looking ahead, I should draw my hon. Friend's attention to the fact that financial support will be available to the churches for the role that we anticipate that they will play in celebrating the new millennium. All the Christian churches have a potentially vital contribution to make in what is, at its heart, a year of religious significance—the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Christ. The Government are liaising closely with all the churches on how the spiritual aspects of the millennium can be reflected in plans for marking the occasion. In preparation, many historic Anglican churches will benefit from grants worth more than £5 million approved by the Millennium Commission for restoring belfries and casting new bells, for a nationwide peal of church bells to ring in the new millennium.

My hon. Friend mentioned the recently published Church of England document "Developing the Partnership between Church and State over the Ecclesiastical Heritage". Let me say at once that the Government warmly welcome the document. As I have already said, the existing Church and state partnership has already achieved a great deal. However, we are ready to discuss new ways in which the partnership can be developed and strengthened. From what my hon. Friend said in his speech, he might like to use his fertile imagination and experience to suggest ways in which that might be done.

There is much in the Church's document with which we whole-heartedly agree. The financial difficulties and pressures currently facing the Church of England are well understood by the Government. I have to say, too, that there are also constraints on the state side. The continuing need to control public expenditure means that heritage spending programmes are likely to remain under pressure for the foreseeable future. None the less, the Government are ready to work with the Church in exploring other possible sources of funding for the ecclesiastical heritage—for example, from Europe. We are also willing to consider what steps can be taken to improve co-ordination between all the Government and non-Government agencies with a potential role.

His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury has already had discussions on the issues with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage and my noble Friend the

Minister for Tourism. As the next step, officials in my Department will hold discussions with the General Synod to explore the issues raised in the document in detail, identify the constraints on each side and explore possible new options.

Without prejudice to the outcome of the discussions, it may be helpful if I make a couple of observations in response to some comments made in the Church's document. The first is the concern that the Government have gone back on their commitment to the additionality of lottery funding. The document urges that English Heritage funding should not be reduced to take account of the advent of the lottery. I can assure the House that the Government stand by their commitment to the additionality of lottery funding and that we therefore have no intention of reducing core funding programmes to take account of awards from the lottery.

That commitment does not mean that the Government can set aside the constraints on public expenditure to which I have already referred. None the less, I hope hon. Members will have found some encouragement in our recent decision to grant an additional £1.8 million to English Heritage in 1997-98, which means that funding for next year will be substantially maintained at this year's level. It is of course for English Heritage to decide how best to allocate the available resources across all its activities.

The second point relates to the claim—as my hon. Friend mentioned—that, in 1993, VAT on churches and cathedrals repairs cost the Church about £16 million, far more than it receives in English Heritage grants. The document calls for the Government to press the European Commission to add listed building repairs to the categories of services eligible for reduced rates of VAT at national discretion, as alterations already are. My hon. Friend will know that, as a tax matter, this is the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. While we have no particular reason to doubt the Church of England's £16 million figure on the amount of VAT paid, I have to say that the way VAT is collected does not allow Customs and Excise to calculate the amount of VAT paid on churches or on listed buildings.

Furthermore, the VAT directive that requires repairs to be taxed at the full 17.5 per cent. is about to be reviewed. Any decision on whether to increase the scope of the list of goods and services to which a reduced rate of VAT may be applied would be taken by the Finance Ministers of all member states. It is currently the UK Government's policy to have a single rate of VAT at 17.5 per cent., but to retain for the present the existing zero rates, which have been agreed with our EU partners.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving the House the opportunity to debate this important matter. I hope that hon. Members will have been reassured about the Government's continuing commitment to the preservation of our ecclesiastical heritage. We look forward to working closely with the Church of England and other denominations and faiths in pursuit of that objective.

East London and the City Health Authority

1.29 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): This debate should not be necessary. Earlier this year, we debated the circumstances of East London and the City district health authority, partly because of the closure of Bart's and the 30 per cent. reduction in the number of beds planned for the three east London boroughs: Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham. They are three of the neediest boroughs in the country, but they do not lack in human spirit and initiative.

The base problem involves capitation. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) wishes to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, and he may pursue that point further. The money allocated to the authority in order to purchase health facilities from the providers is tied to a national formula that is clearly inadequate. The situation has worsened in the past few years: we would have had £50 million more per year, but for an adjustment in the capitation formula that does not take account of the needs of people coming to the borough from other parts of the world, the age of the population and the health needs of the area. In the same period, I am told that Surrey received an increase of £30 million as a result of the same adjustment. That capitation formula must be altered again.

Recently, we have faced an even bigger, visible—if not financial—anomaly: the way in which psychiatric need is met. We all know about the scandalous difficulties in the mental health service. However, we forget that, when people go to court, are found incapable of pleading properly and are not sentenced, they pass from the responsibility of the Home Office to that of the health service. In my district, there are about 60 or 65 persons of that ilk or those who have been released from prison, upon whom the health service spends some £7 million. We believe that that funding should be provided centrally, as few health districts elsewhere carry that sort of load—I believe that it is only about half a dozen.

We aim at least to sustain health service delivery in the area. Despite claims in the Budget and the Prime Minister's comments in Prime Minister's questions yesterday, we cannot do so. On 2 December, I asked the Secretary of State for Health—who was boasting about increases in health service expenditure—about the situation in east London. He replied:

> "The authority also has bids for other funds, which are currently being considered".—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1996; Vol. 286, c. 686.]

We need those funds because we must sustain existing services with an £18 million shortfall in delivery. The authority has announced cuts of £40 million. We need that additional £18 million—or as much as the Government can supply through the bids. I received a written reply yesterday about the bids for health authorities, which are described as undergoing structural or strategic change. My health authority is undergoing structural change in respect of possible closures, to which I shall refer in a moment.

When Bart's closed, we were told that we would have a new hospital at Homerton. A few weeks ago, the authority published the option of closing Homerton or Newham general hospital—two major hospitals in east London. It was forced to dismiss that option as unfeasible, but it must

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still find the equivalent savings. Newham is experiencing difficulties because it maintains a huge accident and emergency facility—although I understand that it costs less per head of population than many similar facilities elsewhere. A and E needs must be met by relocating facilities and resources from elsewhere in the hospital.

We are facing extensive cuts. The authority has told general practitioners that they must be more careful about hospital admissions—it employs bureaucratic terms such as "gatekeeping" or "readjustment of entry". GPs have been told that out-patients will not be seen until after April 1997 and that waiting times may increase to 18 months. There will be a reduction in provider contracts of 7,500 bed days, which means less provision to meet consistently growing needs.

There are 40 vacancies among the estimated 400 GP posts in the area. GPs are finding the load difficult to bear and thus are less enthusiastic about their perceived role. Why should they stay in east London, when the prevailing conditions do not allow them to do their jobs as professionals? As a result of the cuts, GPs are being asked to recommend fewer people for admission to hospital. They are then required to provide more at-home care when people are released from hospital, under a policy of "fewer in and quicker out". At the same time as they are providing increased care on the ground, they are told to expect redundancies among practice nursing staff and general domiciliary services. Local authority social services also have difficulty meeting existing need.

The need is so great that the local medical committee—a statutory body—took the unusual step of writing to the Secretary of State. It was not alone: it was joined by three voluntary borough forums of general practitioners, who work co-operatively together and play an essential part in the structure. Some 200 signed the letter that was sent to the Secretary of State on 5 November. As of yesterday, I understand that they have received no reply or acknowledgment of the letter. That is astonishing—it may be the result of delayering in the civil service; I do not know. It is all the more remarkable because, having received no reply, the group then sent a letter to *The Times* outlining the problems that they face, which was published on 10 December, but they still received no reply.

I do not know whether officers of the Department of Health read *The Times* or whether the Minister has been briefed about the matter—perhaps he will tell us today when he replies to the debate. In addition, BBC South-East broadcast a 30-minute television programme on 28 November highlighting the plight of the people of east London and the ineffective funding of their health services. I presume that the Department of Health knows about that.

Not only are the professionals in difficulty, but there is pressure on the voluntary organisations. In east London—like everywhere else—there is great concern for those who are ill, who need constant care and who may turn to hostels or to similar organisations to meet their needs. The Newham Care and Repair service, which allows people to be discharged from hospital and returned to their home sooner than might occur otherwise, is to be cut. The elderly derive particular benefit from the service, as their conditions often necessitate structural adjustments in the home and they may require daily care and visits. It is proposed to cut that service—although decisions are still up in the air in view of the £18 million shortfall.

The organisation Turning Point is located in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore)—he may mention it if he catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. An imaginative scheme, Breaking Ground, deals with 15 mentally retarded people with severe health needs. They literally break ground and are recuperated through horticultural activities.

I have mentioned the problem of those who are found incapable of pleading in court. I highlight the terrible instance of a person who was discharged prematurely from Neasden hospital in Hertfordshire—which has its own problems—visited a club run by the borough and murdered one of my constituents. The Laudat Bennett case is well known, but has not been solved properly. I believe that the circumstances that led to the incident are still cause for concern, although increased funding has been provided for psychiatry in the borough.

We face all those difficulties in an area that demonstrably needs more than other areas. I do not think that the Secretary of State understands the effects of the capitation system and the way in which the market works. Each so-called profit centre naturally seeks to make its own economies without knowing the human knock-on effects. Its work is always predicated on contracts, which are sometimes not fulfilled for the future. The Royal London hospital has problems: it usually makes capital gains, but it cannot be sure of the plans.

The biggest problem of all is closures. It is clear from the documents that have been produced by East London and the City health authority that it is considering closing not Newham or Homerton hospital, but St. Andrew's hospital in Bromley-by-Bow. It is an old building—it is an old workhouse—which has 150 beds and serves mainly Newham. The staff are renowned in the area for their teamwork. They do a great job. The hospital provides ancillary services. By accountants' calculations, it could save so many million pounds if it were run down.

There are long-term plans for the replacement of the facilities at St. Andrew's by facilities at Newham general hospital, which has 40 fewer beds. Those plans depend on the private finance initiative, which is not coming along at all fast. The premature rundown of St. Andrew's in Bromley-by-Bow would be disastrous, and would put pressure on the other hospitals in the area. Beds would be removed and the services provided by the laboratories reduced. The corporate nature of the staff is important: they tend to be long-serving because of the type of surgery that they undertake. They work in difficult conditions, but they are greatly appreciated by the people of Newham.

I want to put several questions to the Minister. Did he receive the letter from GPs? Why did he not reply? Are the facts that it contains not correct? As far as I know, they are. Did he not see their letter in *The Times*? Did he not hear about the half-hour television broadcast that dealt with the problems in east London? How much of the Government's money, which is out for bidding—the complicated document has been placed in the Library—will be available for application by East London and the City health authority? I am told that some of the money that it hopes to obtain has already been included in its calculations: it has been taken into account, even allowing

for the £18 million that the authority has to find. We must know the answer to that question before the coming financial year, in order to make proper plans.

It would be a scandal if people were given long-term notice—which they are now, particularly in the voluntary sector. There are fears throughout the health service staff. The Minister knows that one of the greatest assets of our great health service—or what was once a great health service—is the dedication of the staff. They are being asked to do more and more with less and less. Is that right? The Prime Minister says that the health service is getting more and more, but I do not believe it.

Dissembling has become a d-word in the House, although I would not go as far as to accuse the Government of dissembling in this instance. We need to know—through the loophole of finance—that we shall receive a good part of that £18 million to sustain our services. We are told that the health service is expanding, but how can it be when we have also been told to expect vicious cuts? That is debilitating, and is beginning to destroy a health service of which this country has been proud.

It is because of the initiative of general practitioners and others that we have managed to obtain a response from the people in the service. We await the Government's reply. They are responsible to the electors, who pay for the service that we are all proud of and wish to sustain.

1.44 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on raising this vital subject. As the finances of East London and the City health authority have been spinning out of control, a kind of madness has set in. Hospital closures are still proposed in the medium term. Recently, the chief executive of ELCHA, Peter Coe, said publicly on the radio that no decisions on the closures could be taken before the general election. Thank God for that.

The absurd people who run the most despised bureaucracy in the national health service have at last realised that there are limits to their bizarre betrayal of local people. I am told privately that their thinking is as follows. The Royal London hospital cannot be closed—I certainly do not want it to close—because the Government are committed to spending £300 million on a new hospital there, even if that distorts local finances for decades to come.

In the medium term, the authority wants to close either Homerton or Newham hospital, but not both. It is a satanic choice: Newham people can die, or Hackney people can die—take your pick. Demographically, the authority would prefer to save Newham hospital, with a functioning accident and emergency unit, but Newham has many problems—so I am told—and Homerton is still new and being built, so its closure would be political dynamite.

That is not the end of the savage irrationality. East London and the City health authority has published a list of cuts in community and hospital care. From Hoxton Health to Lorne house, from counselling for Asian women on health to help for Turkish and Kurdish communities, from City and Hackney MIND to the Hackney bereavement service, from Age Concern Hackney to the Jewish care services for frail older people, cuts are being made.

General practitioners are up in arms. Consultants are blinking in disbelief, voluntary organisations are angry, and the rest of us are stunned. We wait with interest to see whether the Minister is more than complacent today.

1.45 pm

Mr. Stephen Timms (Newham, North–East): I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on securing this important debate.

East London health services have the most overstretched staff, who work in the shabbiest conditions and deal with the highest levels of ill health in the country. It is scandalous that they struggle in the 1990s in decrepit conditions that were obsolete in the 1970s. Whatever measurement we use, Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham have the highest concentration of health and social problems in the country.

At a time when the Government tell us that they are substantially increasing the resources for the health service, how is it that in east London we are facing the appalling cuts that my hon. Friends described? A couple of years ago, the Government removed the needs weighting for the 24 per cent. of funds in the capitation formula that relate to community health services. At first sight, that may appear to be an obscure technical adjustment, but its consequences for east London have been catastrophic, and have culminated in this crisis.

In the summer of last year, an article in the *Health Service Journal* presented the top 10 losers from that adjustment to the formula developed at York university and introduced by the Department of Health. East London suffered the largest cash loss to its target—£13.2 million. The other biggest losers were Manchester, Liverpool, Sunderland, Barnsley, North Durham, St. Helen's and Knowsley, South of Tyne, Tees and Newcastle.

In whose interest did the Government decide that they needed to make the adjustment? Which areas have such a pressing case for help that it was necessary to cut the amount for east London, Sunderland, Middlesbrough and Knowsley? The article spelled it out. The biggest gainer of all, with more than a 5 per cent. increase, was mid-Surrey. The second biggest gainer in the entire country was north-west Surrey. The third biggest was south-west Surrey, and the fourth was east Surrey. Who was the Secretary of State for Health while all that chicanery was going on? It was none other than the right hon. Member for South–West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley).

The Government have cynically siphoned funds away from areas where they are most needed, to spend them in areas where they think that they can buy the most votes. The health needs of Britain have lost out to the vote needs of the Tory party. The Tory party has concluded that it can get away with gerrymandering the health funding formula. That is why we are now facing this crisis. The figures for next year provide us with no comfort at all.

I take no pleasure in recounting those facts, but I make no apology for being angry about the crisis. As I left home in East Ham this morning, my next-door neighbour told me of the problems that she was having getting the treatment that she needs at our local hospital. She said, "I do not blame the doctors," and nor do I. I do not even blame the administrators appointed by the Government to run the service: in this instance, I think that they are doing their best. The fault lies fairly and squarely with the

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Conservative party, and the Government's record on health in the hardest-pressed parts of the country is a disgrace.

Across east London, partnerships between local authorities, businesses and Government are bearing fruit and generating new optimism. In health, partnership has barely started, and we are still stuck with the problems of the 1970s. With these huge funding cuts, we are poised to take a huge leap backwards.

The London Docklands development corporation—itself as proud a creature of this Government as any—has at times been in despair at the impossibility of making progress in the health service in east London. What is the Government's response? Their response is to make £18 million-worth of cuts, which constitutes the axing of 5 per cent. of the total budget. I appeal to the Minister to take a close look at the problems in east London, and to see whether, even now, there is some way of averting the catastrophe that is looming.

1.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Horam): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on his success in securing the debate, and am pleased to be able to respond. I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's persistent and pertinent questioning of my hon. Friend the Minister for Health and me over the past few months on issues relating to the problems that we are discussing; I also acknowledge the interests of the hon. Members for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) and for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms), both of whom are obviously sincerely concerned about the issues.

East London and the City health authority, the local health authority of the hon. Member for Newham, South, is one of the largest health authorities in London, with a population of about 600,000. Like every health authority, it is responsible for studying the health needs of the local population, and ensuring the availability and provision of appropriate care and treatment for local residents.

Health authorities' allocations for 1997-98 were recently announced. East London and the City will receive an integrated allocation of £365.4 million—more money than ever before, and a real-terms increase of £8.7 million, or nearly 2.5 per cent., on its funding this year. That is the 11th highest percentage increase awarded to the 100 health authorities in England; I stress that in response to the points made by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East.

As a student of these matters, the hon. Member for Newham, South will know that what we mean by "integrated allocation" is the general allocation of £348 million, together with other allocations influenced by the weighted capitation formula. On top of all that, the authority will receive £25.6 million in non-formula-based moneys for services such as long-term care. After adjustments, that gives the authority a total cash budget of nearly £390 million for 1997-98. Furthermore, central funding is available for national priorities. The health authority is bidding for those funds, and therefore may well have more to spend next year. That means that East London and the City health authority will have at least £650 for each of its residents to spend on health care next year.

Ms Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): If what the Minister is saying is correct, does he not agree that the money must be being misspent? Speech therapy will now be refused to 375 children between the ages of five and 11, and Moorfields hospital is turning away patients from east London who want eye operations and appointments, because of the reduced funding of the contract for east London and the City health authority. Where is all the extra money going?

Mr. Horam: The extra money is going into the provision of extra services in some areas. If the hon. Lady wishes to take up the question of precisely where there may be some underfunding, that is a matter for the health authority, and I am sure that she will take it up with the authority.

How the health authority uses the extra money is a matter for it to determine, having regard to all local needs, circumstances and views. I remind the hon. Member for Newham, South not only that more money is going to East London and the City and other health authorities this year than ever before, but that, with the merger of district health authorities and family health service authorities from the beginning of April, and with ever-increasing efficiency, more money on top of that is available for health services and direct patient care.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, East London and the City's population is ethnically diverse and characteristic of London's densely populated inner-city areas, and it makes much of that. In response to the point made so forcefully—but, in my view, mistakenly—by the hon. Member for Newham, North-East, let me say that our allocation policy is to target resources where the need for health care services is greatest. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Newham, South must listen to what I am saying. Hospital and community health service funding is largely based on a national formula worked out on the basis of the size of the local population, weighted to take account of factors such as the number of very young or very old people and the degree of social deprivation that exists. It also takes account of market forces such as the higher costs of staff, buildings and land in the south-east.

Next year, for the first time, the formula includes a specific needs index for community health services—the hon. Gentleman referred to that—bringing 86 per cent. of the national allocation within the ambit of the formula. That will benefit the health authorities in inner-city areas such as east London.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Horam: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not. I have only five minutes left in which to respond to at least four hon. Members.

Both the changes that have been made to the formula for next year—the introduction of interim needs weighting for community health services, and the refinement of the market forces adjustment—will improve the health authority's weighted-capitation position. That not only means more funds for the authority next year; it means

that the authority is no longer above its weighted-capitation position. It is no longer what we call a capitation loser, and can look forward to a larger share of additional health resources over the next few years. As the hon. Gentleman knows, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has committed himself to real-terms increases in resources year after year when we are re-elected for the next Parliament.

Before I say more about funding or service planning for next year, let me say something about the health authority's position this year, and the ability of the service to cope for the remainder of the financial year. The authority's initial allocation for the current year was £337 million—£1.63 million more in real terms than in 1995-96. Its forecast at the end of the second financial quarter was that it would end the year with a £13.7 million deficit. That forecast was based on expenditure and trends up to that time; I stress that it is not the position in which the authority is likely to find itself at the end of the year. That is the whole point of forecasts: as part of a proper regime of good financial management and control, they allow action to be taken in good time to keep within the financial balance for the year as a whole.

The health authority has indeed taken action based on its analysis of local circumstances, to ensure that good-quality services continue to be available, and that a sound financial outturn is achieved. In the autumn it bid for, and has received, additional non-recurring funds of £6 million to support strategic change. That is a lump of money that is already going in this year, in addition to the money which—as the hon. Gentleman said—it has bid for next year. That £6 million, together with other measures, means that the authority's residual deficit is now estimated at £2.3 million, or just 0.7 per cent. of its allocation. It is for the authority to manage its affairs for the rest of the year to meet its financial position. The situation certainly does not suggest that local people should be in any way concerned about the continued availability of good-quality services; nor does it suggest a service close to collapse, as some commentators have tried to imply.

What about next year? First, let me say that—as I think the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge—East London and the City health authority has been very open with the local community in planning for the future. Given that health care resources can never be infinite and that health authorities must prioritise among competing demands, it is only right for them to outline some of the difficult choices that they must make as purchasers, and to involve the local community in the making of those choices.

In planning for next year, the health authority set up three task groups, which were charged with looking at acute, mental health and primary and community care services. The process began with an exercise to quantify the implications of continuing with the existing health strategy; that is where the projected deficit of £18 million for next year comes from.

Essentially, we are talking about a re-balancing process. We are looking at national and local priorities, and at the balance between, for example, acute services on the one hand and mental health services on the other. That is how the funding will be rearranged, with the aim of meeting what are regarded as priorities. In addition, the health authority is bidding against the funds that we have made available for next year for the development of services in priority areas. I cannot yet say how much will be allocated, but it will include money for community care, adult intensive care and mental health services, which are a particular problem in that part of the world. I take the hon. Gentleman's point: we shall have to make a decision on that before the end of the year.

I shall certainly look into what the hon. Gentleman said about the letter that was sent to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—

Mr. Spearing: From the 200 doctors.

Mr. Horam: That letter was sent at the end of November, and I saw the letter in *The Times*. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman, however, that far from more and more being got from less and less, in East London and the City more and more is being got from more and more.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Drugs (Clubs and Raves)

1. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he is taking to protect young people from drugs when attending clubs and raves in Scotland. [8131]

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): We have given councils the powers to control or close down raves for the purpose of safeguarding young people attending events in licensed premises.

Mr. Rathbone: That is welcome news because there are great dangers for young people at these dance parties, as is proven by recent research results which show that the real danger of Ecstasy is not appreciated by many young people who are tempted to take it. Has my hon. Friend considered issuing either the guidelines that have been produced by the London drug policy forum in a document called "Dance Till Dawn Safely" or replicating such guidelines for use by clubs in Scotland?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall certainly consider that. My hon. Friend is correct: there is evidence of an association between the use of Ecstasy and substantial liver damage. It is a class A drug which carries penalties of up to seven years for possession, and life for trafficking. We have set up a new national drugs helpline to provide free confidential advice, support and referrals 24 hours a day to drug misusers, their families and friends, and to supply information for anybody who is concerned about drugs.

Government Expenditure and Tax Revenues

2. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the difference between total Government expenditure in Scotland and tax revenues raised in Scotland, expressed as a proportion of Scottish gross domestic product; and if he will make a statement. [8132]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): Fourteen per cent.

Mr. Arnold: Does not that rather generous figure emphasise the good sense of our United Kingdom Government, and would not that generosity be put in danger by Labour's devolution plans? Hypothetically, if those devolution plans were put into effect, how would I as an English Member explain to my constituents why, despite that money going to Scotland, Scottish hon. Members could take decisions on issues in my constituency such as health, education and hospitals, although I would not have a similar say over the spending of United Kingdom resources in Scotland?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend will forgive me for not agreeing with his use of the word "generous". As I have just completed public expenditure negotiations with the Treasury, my use of that word might be somewhat wrong. On the overall position, my hon. Friend is right to point out what a good deal Scotland gets from the Union and how our public services and our standard of living would be threatened and destroyed by the policies of the opposition parties either to establish a tax-raising Parliament or to obtain independence—and, of course, the latter would follow from the former.

Mr. Maxton: On Monday, what amount of tax revenue was used to pay for the cost of an RAF aeroplane to fly the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland from Inverness to London? Is the Secretary of State prepared to tell the House exactly how much such journeys cost the Scottish Office?

Mr. Forsyth: The cost of the smallest RAF aeroplane, which is what we used, so we could not accommodate the hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends on board—although I would have been happy to strap the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) to the aircraft's wing after his behaviour at the Highlands and Islands Convention—is about £700 per flying hour.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the high revenue level indicates the Scottish economy's success? Is not that confirmed by today's announcement of a dramatic drop in unemployment in Scotland, which shows how well the Scottish economy is going under the Government?

Mr. Forsyth: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Scotland's economy is booming. We have record inward investment. Today, we again have excellent unemployment figures. It is a picture of an economy that has been transformed as a result of the Government's policies, which have been opposed by Opposition Members. All of it would be put at risk by a tartan-tax-raising Scottish Parliament.

Mr. George Robertson: Will the Secretary of State confirm his already public statement that the Scottish Office budget will be reduced by £880 million in real terms in the next three years? What will that mean for public health in Scotland and our ability to control crises such as E. coli bacteria and the spread of salmonella in Scotland? What if Professor Pennington's expert group suggests, as it should, that there should be an independent food standards agency? Will that be vetoed, like his last research project, on the ground that there is not enough money for it? When will the Government stop covering up their conduct in the E. coli crisis by blaming everyone but Ministers of the Crown? Will the Secretary of State now belatedly tell the House and the country what the role of Ministers was at the beginning of the E. coli crisis in Lanarkshire?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman is pathetic. We have had two statements to the House on that matter. I wish that he would stop attacking the conduct of North Lanarkshire council, a Labour authority, which, as he well knows, has been and is responsible, under the Food Safety Act 1990, which had all-party support in the House, for environmental health services.

When we win the election, Scotland's health service will benefit from our pledge to increase spending year on year in real terms throughout the whole of the next Parliament, a promise that the hon. Gentleman is not allowed to make and cannot make because he has already made promises in secret to his friends in local government.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, relative to the Scottish budget and expenditure, if we were ever to have a Parliament in Edinburgh that decided on matters such as health, Scottish Members could not raise those issues, as the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) has just done, because they would be part-time and unable to ask questions about Scottish matters—and should be paid part-time wages?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) hopes to have many Labour Members coming down from Scotland, whose job would be not to represent Scotland's interests, but to impose socialism on England. That unstable position would wreck his party's proposals, as it has wrecked every previous home rule proposal, but my hon. Friend makes the important point that Scotland's budget would still be determined here at Westminster, where Scotland's voice would be diminished, as hon. Members on the Liberal Benches acknowledge, through the loss of the office of Secretary of State for Scotland in Cabinet. With a tax-raising Parliament in Edinburgh, it is difficult to see how our present advantageous position would be maintained. The hon. Member for Hamilton and his colleagues are putting their socialist interests ahead of the interests of people who depend on education, health, social work and all our other caring services in Scotland. We will expose that in the forthcoming election campaign.

Skye Bridge Tolls

3. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the impact of the Skye bridge tolls upon the economy of the highlands and western isles; and if he will make a statement. [8133]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): All our research shows it has been an enormous success.

Mr. Kennedy: Will the Minister acknowledge that there is recognition throughout the highlands and islands that this vexed issue will probably be resolved only with the outcome of the general election? The Scottish Liberal Democrats will be campaigning on a manifesto commitment to abolish the tolls. In the interim, given the Secretary of State's commitment on Monday at the Highlands and Islands Convention that the economics of all this will be examined, will he take account of the evidence that has been provided by the joint consultants report to the Highland council and Skye and Lochalsh Enterprise, which showed that the number of heavy goods vehicles and coaches using the bridge has declined by no less than 25 per cent. since it opened? That is having a drastic economic impact on Skye and the Western Isles. I hope that we can have the Minister's commitment that that will be taken into account in the pre-election assessment that is to take place.

Mr. Kynoch: I should have hoped that the hon. Gentleman would have recognised what a success the bridge has been for Skye. The figures for the first year, compared with those for the last year of the ferry, show a 16 per cent. increase in throughput. Skye has benefited from the bridge, as has the Mallaig ferry. I should have hoped that he would recognise that the bridge has brought significant benefits to his constituents in Skye.

It was the idea of the Highland regional council that the bridge should be constructed. If tolls were to be removed, that would put a burden on other areas of local authority expenditure. I challenge the hon. Gentleman: if he is willing to put such a pledge in his election manifesto, where would he cut services in the highlands to pay for it?

Mr. Stewart: Does my hon. Friend agree that the cuts might not be in the highlands? If the tolls were paid for by the Scottish Office, the money might come from cuts in programmes that would affect my constituents in Eastwood. Will my hon. Friend send a firm message to the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) and his campaigners that, if that is a possibility, it is not on?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend has put his finger on it. The proposals from the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats—*[Interruption.]* Scottish National party members seem to be indicating that they have the same policies. I am not aware of that party vigorously supporting a tax-raising Parliament other than seeing it as a stepping stone to full independence.

If the Opposition's policy of a tax-raising Parliament came about, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) would be absolutely right. If the cost had to be funded from the Scottish Office, who knows where it might be taken from. It could be taken from Eastwood—it could even be Hamilton. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) might have to face the stark reality of telling his constituents how he would fund something—for a change.

Mr. Macdonald: Can the Minister name any other bridge in Britain that is part of the public highway but is not funded, at least in part, out of public taxation? How can he justify using the most remote communities in Britain as the victims of this unique experiment in privatisation?

Mr. Kynoch: I should have hoped that the hon. Gentleman would recognise that, originally, the people of Skye and the tourists visiting Skye had to use a ferry to get there. The tolls charged on the new bridge are significantly less than the ferry fares.

Mr. Macdonald: They are not.

Mr. Kynoch: When one looks at the published fares, even the discount fares, one can see that the tolls are significantly less. Only large buses benefited from a non-seasonal discount. Now, across the board, there are low season discounts on tolls, some of which are

significantly less than the fares in the last year of the ferry's operation. The hon. Gentleman should recognise that the bridge has brought about a 16 per cent. increase in throughput for the benefit of the people of Skye.

Mr. John Marshall: The question refers in part to the economy of the highlands and the western isles. Does my hon. Friend agree that the whisky industry is important to that area? Will he congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on being the first Chancellor of the Exchequer to reduce duty on whisky in two consecutive Budgets, and welcome the fact that the Japanese are reducing their discrimination against Scotch? The people of Scotland will drink a toast and a wee dram to the Chancellor—even if mean-minded Opposition Members will not.

Mr. Kynoch: I am glad that my hon. Friend realises the great benefits that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has brought to the whisky industry and—as we were talking about the Skye bridge—to the people of Skye. The bridge makes it that much easier to transport product backwards and forwards between Skye and the mainland, and I am sure that distilleries on Skye will benefit significantly from that improved access.

In the past few years, on average, the ferry has not operated—because of bad weather or maintenance—for approximately 80 hours a year, whereas the bridge, in its first year of operation, was closed for only one hour. I argue not only that my right hon. and learned Friend has brought benefits through his whisky tax reduction—which we all welcome—but that the bridge has enabled the people of Skye to live in very much better spirits than they might have with the ferry.

Mrs. Liddell: Will the Minister explain to the House how many crossings of the Skye bridge could be made for the cost of hiring one RAF jet from Inverness to London? Is that an example of Tory transport policy for the highlands—one service for the privileged, and another for the rest?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Lady demeans herself by couching a question on the highlands in such terms. It is all about a diversionary tactic by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), who spent the first 40 minutes of the first meeting of the Highlands and Islands Convention arguing about procedures.

I think that all those who were present at that meeting agree that, after those first 40 minutes, it was very positive and constructive. We discussed many serious subjects, which was of benefit to the highlands and enabled all the bodies involved in the highlands to get together to co-ordinate their views. We also produced an agenda of topics that future meetings will discuss. Liberal Democrat Members seem to be nodding in agreement. I should think that they would welcome an opportunity to discuss such matters in a sensible forum, without the petty party politics and point-scoring attempted by the hon. Lady.

Uncollected Local Authority Taxes

4. **Sir Irvine Patnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement regarding the level of uncollected local authority taxes in Scotland. [8134]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There is £721 million of uncollected local authority taxes in Scotland.

Sir Irvine Patnick: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. That is a lot of money. Which is the worst offending council? What would be the effect in that and other cities in Scotland if the council collected its dues and demands—in other words, carried out its fiduciary duty?

Mr. Forsyth: On uncollected council tax, the worst offenders are Glasgow, Dundee, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. Glasgow has the largest amount of uncollected council tax. Currently, band D council tax payers in Glasgow have to pay £807. If all the money were collected, however, they would receive a cheque for £315 from the council.

Mr. McAvoy: Does the Secretary of State accept that the £14 billion cost of the poll tax to the British public was due largely to his support for its introduction in Scotland? When will he have the guts and the honesty to confess his share of guilt in imposing that £14 billion tax on the British people? Does he realise the extent to which the people of Scotland regard his cavalier attitude to public spending, which he showed by taking that aircraft on Monday night, as a pathetic spectacle? He might say that the incident was petty, small or minor, but it showed that he has a double standard when it comes to spending public money in Scotland.

Mr. Forsyth: I think that we can take that as a commitment, on behalf of the Labour party, that—if Labour is ever in government—Labour Members will not make any use of RAF jets. I look forward to hearing the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) make that commitment.

Mr. McAvoy: Answer my question.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman wants an answer on the poll tax, but he obviously does not like the answer he has had on the RAF. On his question on the poll tax, the hon. Gentleman might like to note that Labour councils in Scotland are showing an increasingly poor record of collecting council tax. Consequently, council tax payers who pay their council tax are having to pay more. That is what Labour is like in local government, and it would be the same in central Government. If it were ever elected to office, there would be higher taxes and poorer standards in collection and in administering the law. That has been Labour's record in local government, and that is its record in Scotland.

Inward Investment

5. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the major inward investment projects in Scotland in the last six months. [8135]

Mr. Kynoch: We have attracted 45 inward investment projects to Scotland over the past six months. It would be

impossible to list them all, but I shall mention some. They include projects by: Allied Precision, Appryl, Bermo, CWW Logistics, Hyundai, IBM, Instrument Specialities, Level Nine, Lite-On Technology, PM Support Services, Polaroid, Quintiles, Roche, Rohr, Smart Modular Technologies and Techdrill.

Lady Olga Maitland: I congratulate my hon. Friend on a massive vote of confidence in the Conservatives' management of Scotland. Does he agree that it would be a cruel trick to follow Labour's proposals to saddle such successful industry with a tartan tax, a social chapter and a minimum wage? Those measures would destroy jobs and deter future investment. Surely the people of Scotland will vote the right way and ensure that Labour never has a chance there or in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend is right. We have been successful with inward investment because investors recognise the possibility of locating in Scotland and being competitive in world markets. The seasonally adjusted unemployment figures for Scotland released this morning show a reduction of 7,900 people, down to 7.4 per cent. That has happened because Scottish business is competitive.

Saddling Scottish business with increased taxation, through the tartan tax or the trade tax—taking the uniform business rate away and giving control back to Labour local authorities that appear intent on putting costs up—would be counter-productive. Those measures, together with the social chapter and the minimum wage, would be disastrous for Scottish companies. If we want unemployment to continue falling and inward investment to continue flowing into the country, we must provide the right economic conditions for business to succeed. Only this Government can provide that.

Mr. Dalyell: How much taxpayers' money went on those 45 projects?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman is aware that the figures for the regional selective assistance offered to each project are given in the *Edinburgh Gazette* the quarter after the grant is taken up. The figures are not disclosed at the time of granting, because projects put forward for regional selective assistance have commercial sensitivity. It would be wrong to disclose—

Mr. Connarty: The Minister obviously does not know.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) is prattling from a sedentary position about my not—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Connarty) has been constantly prattling from a sedentary position since we started. If he expects to be called to put a question, he might contain himself now.

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman's prattling from a sedentary position shows his ignorance about how inward investment is attracted to Scotland and how jobs are created in Scotland. If he spent a little more time considering his party's policies, he might get a little further in succeeding in keeping people in Scotland and keeping investment flowing in.

Mr. Gallie: I welcome the fall in unemployment in Scotland—from 7.8 per cent. to 7.4 per cent.—that has been announced today. What proportion of that fall could be attributed to inward investment, and how much to the uniform business rate and its beneficial effects on small businesses? Does my hon. Friend agree that changing the uniform business rate—as the Labour party wants—would be a disaster for those who want to be employed in Scotland?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend is right to concentrate on the uniform business rate, because businesses, particularly small businesses, in Scotland have been crying out for it and are pleased to see it. They now have a level playing field throughout Scotland and England.

The Opposition's policy of returning the uniform business rate to local government control and linking it to an increase in band D council tax—the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) does not seem to have decided on the speed with which he will implement it should he ever be able to do so—would have increased business rates for small businesses in Glasgow by 20 per cent. last year. I doubt whether such a policy is good for unemployment. Small businesses would suffer severely under the Labour party's policies.

Mr. Kirkwood: I acknowledge that Locate in Scotland has been very successful in the past six months or so, but does the Minister accept that there is concern that the financial arrangements that it has put in place to achieve that success have been at the expense of some of the other budgets available to local enterprise companies? Will he give an assurance that there will be no top slicing, which would result in other parts of Scotland paying the price for the recipients of Locate in Scotland's excellent work?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman knows that regional selective assistance, for example, is equally available to indigenous companies. He has drawn the situation in the borders to my attention on numerous occasions. As he knows, I visited the borders in August and talked to Borders Enterprise, which will be putting its case to Scottish Enterprise. Scottish Enterprise is responsible for looking after inward investment and, more important, indigenous companies.

Mr. McFall: The Government have our support in attracting inward investment. The Minister knows that neither added value nor technology ventures have been very successful. What is he doing to convert inward investment into indigenous growth in Scotland? He will be aware that only 21 per cent. of the supplies of inward investors are secured in Scotland. If that figure rose by just 5 per cent., we could produce a Chungwha every year, creating 2,000 jobs. What are the Government doing in those two crucial areas?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman has double standards. I recognise his point about attracting research and development—he should welcome the fact that some inward investors are moving research and development activities into Scotland, and we shall obviously try for

more—but the Opposition's taxation proposals would be far more damaging to the prospects of a Chungwha coming to the country. Given his party's taxation regime, it is utter folly for him to talk about getting a Chungwha every year.

Local Authority Completions

6. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many local authority new dwellings were completed in 1995. [8137]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Raymond S. Robertson): Just under 400.

Mrs. Fyfe: Does the Minister realise that, in Glasgow alone, the number of homeless applicants on the waiting list is more than 2,000? Is not that just one of the many scandalous aspects of the Government's housing policy? Does he agree with today's leader in *The Herald* in Glasgow, which describes our housing system as rotten to the core and in urgent need of reform?

Mr. Robertson: I agree that our housing system is in urgent need of reform. That is why I have spent the past year and a half encouraging local authorities, such as the one in her constituency, to remove themselves from being direct providers of housing and to transfer their housing stock to housing associations and housing companies.

I hope that the hon. Lady's council, like all others in Scotland, will address the number of vacant properties they have, which amount to 2.5 per cent. of Scotland's entire council housing stock.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Does the Minister accept that the problem of homelessness is not confined to urban areas? Rural homelessness is an increasing problem. The former Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy and North East Fife district council sold 40 per cent. of its local authority stock and performed the best in Scotland, yet it was not allowed to apply the proceeds from that sale to the problem of homelessness in its area. Why will the Government not adopt a much more flexible approach to the use of council house sales receipts?

Mr. Robertson: Is the hon. and learned Gentleman aware that £4 billion-worth of housing debt has to be repaid? That has gone up by 6 per cent. in the past year alone. If he and his hon. Friends are not willing to protect council tenants, I assure him that we most definitely are.

Mr. Chisholm: Does the Minister accept that the dreadful new build figure that he gave will be even worse next year with the 30 per cent. cut in council housing budgets and that the number of housing association starts next year will be slashed from 4,000 to 1,500 due to the 25 per cent. cut in their budgets? Does he realise that renovation of cold, damp houses will be similarly curtailed, at great cost to people's health and NHS budgets? How can the Government seriously claim that they make health a priority when they promote ill health in that way and waste more and more money each year on NHS bureaucracy, as today's annual health statistics make abundantly clear?

Mr. Robertson: Despite all the rumblings and mutterings from Opposition spokesmen on housing since my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made his statement, no one has ever said that, if Labour were in our position, it would not require local authorities to make the debt repayments that we require. Perhaps one of them would like to indicate, by nodding or shaking his head, whether Labour would go along with that policy.

As always on such matters, they see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil; they will not say anything at all. The Opposition criticise us for doing something, but they will not even say whether they would go along with it or cancel it. I hope that every council tenant in Scotland appreciates the fact that, although the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Chisholm) comes to the Dispatch Box and says one thing, he apparently has not a clue what he would do if he were ever given the privilege of being a Minister.

Scottish Homes

7. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received about the sale of Scottish Homes housing stock. [8138]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: My right hon. Friend has received seven letters in the past three months, two of which were from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Canavan: If the Government really want to promote diversity of choice for tenants, why was Falkirk council disqualified from submitting a bid in the Falkirk area, and the Link housing association bid excluded on the grounds that it did not meet the benchmark valuation, although there had been no prior stipulation that would lead to exclusion? As a result, for some housing estates the only bid being considered is that by Paragon, which is in an advantageous position, with access to Scottish Homes funding, staff and inside information. When there is only one name on the ballot paper, is not democracy reduced to a farce?

Mr. Robertson: I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman. In view of the nonsense that we have just heard from the Opposition Front Bench, surely he is not asking us to go ahead with stock transfers that do not give value for money. That was the basis on which the other bidders were ruled out, and each of them has had the chance to rebid. Does the hon. Gentleman genuinely think that we should go to the National Audit Office and say that we will accept any bid, regardless of value for money? The Paragon housing association has no greater access to information than any of the other bidders, as the hon. Gentleman knows full well.

Mr. Gallie: Is my hon. Friend aware that a recent survey revealed that 80 per cent. of people in Scotland say that they want to own their own homes? Can he confirm that since 1979, when 35 per cent. of homes were in private ownership, we have achieved 58 per cent. ownership, and that we are well on the way to achieving recognition by the people of Scotland of the fact that we are meeting their aspirations?

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend is right. The significant increase in home ownership during the

Government's 18 years in office, from eastern European levels to almost 60 per cent., is a tremendous credit to the people of Scotland. That great achievement was fought for in the teeth of opposition by the Labour party both in the House and in town halls and council chambers throughout Scotland. To its eternal shame, Labour fought to refuse our people the right to buy and own their own homes.

Local Government Finance

8. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received concerning the 1997–98 financial settlement for Scottish local government. [8139]

Mr. Kynoch: Representations were received from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and a number of individual councils and other bodies prior to the announcement of the 1997-98 local government finance settlement.

Mr. McAllion: Does the Minister accept that within that settlement there is a savage 30 per cent. cut in spending on council housing in Scotland at a time when one in four of Scotland's children lives in housing which suffers from dampness, condensation and mould? When there are 7,000 excess deaths in Scotland every year, why are the Government cutting the spending that would keep people's homes warm and dry? Do the Government not understand that cuts in the housing programme increase ill health and thus add to the burdens on an already overstretched national health service?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman is great at knocking our proposals for local government in the coming year, but he does not say from where he would take the extra funding if he had the opportunity to decide. Last year he was good enough to tell us that he would take it from the health service. This year he was tempted into saying that he would take it from law and order. We regard health and law and order as priorities, and we believe that local government must get its house in order and start making itself efficient. The settlement that we have given it this year is more than reasonable.

Mr. Richards: Does my hon. Friend have any information about the views of the Scottish business community on the financial settlement for local government next year, especially in the light of the Labour party's proposals for devolution and the disclosures of the level of uncollected taxes and the fact that some 54 per cent. of Scottish gross domestic product may be taken up in public expenditure when the target for the UK as a whole is 40 per cent.?

Mr. Kynoch: Business must regard local government with amazement when Glasgow cries out that it is short of funds but spends some £400,000 on painting the Clyde red to celebrate the centenary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress. What has that to do with providing services to the people of Glasgow? As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the £200 million or so of uncollected tax could mean that band D council tax payers would receive a cheque. The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) may be interested to know that, if the £25 million uncollected tax in Dundee were applied to band D council tax, it would reduce it by 68 per cent.

Mr. David Marshall: Does the Minister have any clue about the seriousness of the situation facing the people of Glasgow as a result of cuts in the budgets of Scottish Homes, the Greater Glasgow health board and Glasgow Development Agency, and the almost total lack of inward investment projects attracted by Locate in Scotland, which has been singularly unsuccessful in doing anything on behalf of the city? As Glasgow is Scotland's metropolitan area, when will the Minister drop his anti-Glasgow bias and do something to benefit the people of Glasgow, instead of carping all the time?

Mr. Kynoch: I am disappointed that the hon. Gentleman does not recognise that I was present at the announcement of an inward investment for Glasgow only the other day—a call centre for Polaroid. Several call centres, with several hundred jobs, have gone to Glasgow. The hon. Gentleman complains about Glasgow development agency's budget, but it has not yet been told its budget for next year. Perhaps he should get his facts right.

Mr. Stewart: Is my hon. Friend aware that local authority expenditure in Glasgow is 57 per cent. higher per head of population than in neighbouring East Renfrewshire? That is unsurprising, as Glasgow does not know how many social workers it has. Is it not time that the Scottish Office moved resources away from high-spending cities to needy outlying areas which would spend the money far more effectively?

Mr. Kynoch: Having been the Minister responsible for local government in Scotland very successfully for many years, my hon. Friend knows how the allocation of funds to local authorities works, using a formula based on discussions between the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Office. To give Glasgow a little more time to adjust to the formula allocation, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last year gave it an extra £15 million. Councillor Gould, when he came to see the Secretary of State, said that he would use that time wisely. The fact that the social work budget has been exceeded six months into the new year by £3.4 million does not say much for the financial controls. I hope that at the end of the year Glasgow will have done what it agreed to do almost 12 months ago.

Mrs. Ray Michie: It will no doubt be music to the Minister's ears to hear that Argyll and Bute council is embarked on cost cutting and so-called efficiency savings with proposals to axe staff and close three rural schools, one of which is on an island. Why will he not accept that Argyll and Bute, with so many islands to service—which, as he knows, is a costly business—should qualify for the special islands needs allowance?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Lady has raised the matter with me before, and Argyll and Bute council raised it when I visited in the summer. I am well aware of the council's concerns and needs, which must be reflected in the grant-aided expenditure formula that is applied to it. That is not a matter for me or for the Secretary of State, but

for the joint COSLA and Scottish Office distribution committee. I know that the hon. Lady's council has been putting its point to the distribution committee, and I urge it, if it believes that it has a case, to continue to do so.

Mr. George Robertson: Will the Minister admit that the crisis created by the local Government settlement this year, which has at its roots the costs left behind by the gerrymandering of local government by the Conservative Government, will impact upon real services for real people, including schools in the Stirling constituency, which will be badly hit next year as a consequence? Is it not true that that settlement will also impact upon environmental health departments in councils all over Scotland, and therefore hinder their ability to deal with the type of food poisoning outbreaks that we have seen in the past month?

When will Ministers accept responsibility and answer questions about what they did or did not do at the beginning of the E. coli crisis? What have they got to hide? Why are they afraid to answer the questions that have been repeatedly asked about it? They must stop passing the blame to local authorities and carry the can.

Mr. Kynoch: That is the hon. Member who believes that he is capable of being Secretary of State for Scotland. I am disappointed that he does not recognise the responsibilities outlined in the Food Safety Act 1990: it is local authorities' concern, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made perfectly clear. I hoped that the hon. Gentleman would praise the work of his Labour council and the council executive for what they have done during the difficult crisis.

On local government funding, the hon. Member constantly says that we do not give enough to local Government, but constantly refuses to say where he would take from in order to give local government more. If he is serious about being part of a potential Government of the country it is about time he told the House and the country where he would sacrifice spending in order to give it to local government, which is more than well funded in relation to the rest of the United Kingdom.

Homelessness

9. **Ms Roseanna Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met Shelter to discuss homelessness in Scotland. [8140]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: On 29 November.

Ms Cunningham: Does the Minister agree that the right to a warm, secure and affordable home is a fundamental human right? Has he seen the recent figures from Shelter, which show a 63 per cent. rise in homelessness in Scotland in the past 10 years? In view of that, how can he justify the devastating cuts in the public sector housing budget this year? Will he not at least try to do something to help by commuting the housing debt, in the same way as was done for the private water authorities in England?

Mr. Robertson: The selective quoting of statistics does the House no good. The hon. Lady should perhaps have quoted the figure which shows that homelessness in Scotland is falling—last year it fell by 3 per cent. Shelter does our local authorities no credit by not giving them the credit for providing homes for 90 per cent. of families deemed unintentionally homeless and therefore in priority need. As for the commutation of debt, the hon. Lady tries to imply that there is some magic way of getting rid of the £4 billion debt. It must be picked up by someone. She has asked for it to be transferred to the national Exchequer. Her party's spending proposal have been independently costed and would cause a budget deficit of about £8 billion in Scotland. She has just said that she would add 50 per cent., bringing it up to £12 billion.

Mr. Davidson: Will the Minister accept that his unwillingness to express any concern about the levels of homelessness in Scotland causes regret within Scotland? Simply to bluff and bluster and to put questions to the House does not answer the real difficulties in Scotland. Simply to shout and bawl is not an adequate response to the many people in my constituency and in others who do not have a warm, dry house to live in. When will he take those problems seriously?

Mr. Robertson: If I did not care about the plight of the homeless in Scotland, I would not have issued a new draft code on homelessness as guidance for local authorities. I would not have put it out for consultation, nor withdrawn it because of some of the concerns that were expressed. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have repeatedly said that we are willing to consult all the relevant bodies in the next few weeks with regard to revising the draft code to ensure that it meets Scottish circumstances in a particularly Scottish way. That does not strike me as the action of a Government who do not care.

10. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress is being made in introducing a rough sleepers initiative in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [8141]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: My right hon. Friend issued a consultation paper on the rough sleepers initiative on 11 December.

Sir Russell Johnston: The Minister knows that my question was tabled before the statement was made. Following the variety of questions on housing, has the Minister seen the latest Shelter estimate that the housing waiting list in Scotland is now longer, at 194,579, than it has ever been? Is that not a dreadful comment at the end of 17 years of Tory government?

Mr. Robertson: I regret that the hon. Gentleman chooses to question me about rough sleepers. When we introduce a rough sleepers initiative, he chooses to ignore the fact that we have done so. That is a matter of real regret. If the hon. Gentleman genuinely had at heart the issue of rough sleeping in Scotland, he would not have continued with that question.

In reply to a previous question, I said that 2.5 per cent. of all council houses in Scotland are vacant. I hope that all local authorities, including the hon. Gentleman's, will turn their attention to getting those houses back into use.

Ms Rachel Squire: Is the Minister aware that approximately 1,800 pensioners in Scotland become

homeless every year and that there is a severe shortage of all types of sheltered accommodation, especially public rented accommodation, to meet the needs of elderly and disabled people? Is he aware that, far from enabling local authorities to adapt and improve unsuitable housing that would allow the elderly to remain and live in the community, the Government's housing policies—especially the increase from 25 per cent. to 75 per cent. for debt redemption—will force many elderly people to abandon their homes and communities and go into institutional care?

Mr. Robertson: First, the hon. Lady obviously has not heard of our care and repair policy, which provides funds to allow elderly people to do the very thing that she describes—to adapt their own homes so that they can stay in them. The hon. Lady is right to say that that is where many of them wish to remain.

Perhaps the hon. Lady's remarks would be better directed towards hon. Members on the Labour Front Bench, who have committed not one more penny than my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has committed to spending on housing in Scotland. I am happy to stand by the plans that my right hon. Friend outlined. The hon. Lady's own Front Benchers will not commit one penny more for housing in Scotland. I hope that she questions them in the same way as she has questioned me.

11. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many responses he received in the consultation process on the draft code of guidance on homelessness; and when he expects to report his conclusions. [8142]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: We have received 140 responses to the consultation document and we shall publish the final code early next year.

Mr. Welsh: Will the Minister admit that not one closing date submission supported temporary housing for the homeless? Does he accept that temporary housing will not solve the problem, and that only permanent housing will meet the needs of individuals and families who are homeless in Scotland?

Mr. Robertson: Indeed, not one response supported it, which is why we have gone on to further consultation, and that is one of the elements under review.

Public Expenditure Statement

12. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on his public expenditure statement presented to the Scottish Grand Committee on 9 December. [8143]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My public expenditure plans have been welcomed by the universities, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish Tourist Board and many others.

Mr. Salmond: And by the RAF.

Mr. Forsyth: Yes, and by the RAF.

Mr. Salmond: Was not the Secretary of State ashamed at having to confirm that total research spending on E. coli 0157 by the Scottish Office over a six-year period amounted to a mere £500,000? Given that it was known well before the tragedy in Lanarkshire that we had a particular problem with E. coli 0157 in Scotland, is that not a deplorably low amount? Does it not typify an attitude in Scottish Office towards research spending, environmental health and public safety which reeks of complacency? Was not the so-called insider in the Health Department who was quoted this weekend right to say that the current hyperactivity of the Secretary of State for Scotland is a cover for his inactivity when it mattered?

Mr. Forsyth: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is no. I am surprised by his ignorance of the way in which research is commissioned by the Government. As he knows, it is done on the advice of the chief scientist's office. He also knows that the Department of Health is the lead Department in that respect. Given that he has been told repeatedly that research into E. coli is more than £2 million, but insists on quoting the Scottish Office figure instead of that for the Department of Health, I can only assume that he is deliberately trying to distort the situation and to make cheap political capital out of a very distressing situation in Scotland. I am sure that he will earn everyone's contempt for doing so.

Mr. Congdon *rose—*

[HON. MEMBERS: "Who is he?"]

Mr. Congdon: Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity to remind those who demand higher public expenditure in Scotland that it is already higher per head than it is in England? Does he agree that those who persist in their demands for devolution will have to answer to taxpayers in England as to why we should continue to subsidise such high levels of public expenditure if they want a devolved Parliament?

Mr. Forsyth: I noticed that several Opposition Members asked "Who is he?" when my hon. Friend asked the question. The answer is that my hon. Friend is one of many Members of the House who would determine Scotland's budget if we ever had a Scottish Parliament with tax-raising powers. It would not be determined by Scottish Members of Parliament sitting in a Scottish Parliament. Those Opposition Members who jeer and sneer at the key point that my hon. Friend makes—that devolution threatens Scotland's public services—should recognise the strength of that argument and realise that their responsibility is to the people of Scotland, not to socialism and the Scottish Labour party.

Private Finance Initiative

13. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which hospital projects he has approved for financing under the private finance initiative. [8144]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Ferryfield elderly care facility in Edinburgh, information systems at Law and Yorkhill hospitals and several contracts for care beds, medical analysis equipment and clinical waste disposal have been approved for financing under the private finance initiative by my right hon Friend or have been

taken forward by health service bodies under delegated authority. A further 15 projects with a capital value of £588 million are at an advanced stage.

Mr. Foulkes: You will have noticed, Madam Speaker, that the Minister did not mention the East Ayrshire community hospital. In view of all the written questions that I have tabled and in view of the fact that the project was delayed for at least two years by the Minister's predecessor as a result of spurious consultation about alternative sites and has now been delayed for another six months because of the PFI proposal, when there is money in the Scottish Office budget to fund that hospital by traditional means, why does the Minister not give it the go-ahead, instead of putting political dogma above my constituents' interests?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: First, the project has not been delayed as the hon. Gentleman says. Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare NHS trust won the competition with other trusts on the basis of providing a new hospital. We are determined to make progress on a PFI proposal so that that important facility can be secured. Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare NHS trust must fully explore whether it can provide a hospital under the PFI. The trust is confident that it can do so by further negotiation. Revised proposals from the bidder arrived as recently as mid-November. Those reduced the costs, but further negotiations are required. Negotiations should proceed as quickly as possible.

Full-time Students

15. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for expanding the number of full-time students in further education taking higher level courses with particular reference to expanding the availability of bursaries. [8146]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Except in those colleges involved in the university of the highlands and islands project, we have no further plans to expand the number of full-time students in further education taking higher education courses. Future arrangements for bursaries are currently under review.

Mr. Worthington: I thank the Minister for responding to the request by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) and myself to provide bursary money to enable students at Clydebank to continue their courses, which they had been prevented from doing as a result of underfunding.

Does the Minister realise that about half the colleges in Scotland which are in financial trouble will be unable to expand to attract more students next year because there will not be the bursary money to support those students in their courses?

Mr. Robertson: I thank the hon. Gentlemen for coming in. We had a useful meeting, which helped to address some of the problems at that college. Regarding the situation on bursaries, I hope that the hon. Gentleman is aware that we are reviewing all this and we have asked for comments from the entire sector with a view to seeing whether any changes need to be made. We have an open mind on that. Last Friday, I had a useful meeting in Inverness with the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) and some of his college principals. If the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington), the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) or any other hon. Member has any views that he wishes to feed in, I am willing to listen to representations and consider the matter.

Mr. Maclennan: Will the Minister carefully examine the plans that are being made, and carried out experimentally in England, to provide proper bursaries for dance and drama students, which are not being mirrored in Scotland? It remains an anomaly that discretionary spending is excluding Scottish would-be dancers and dramatic performers from proper further education opportunities.

Mr. Robertson: Yes, indeed: I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that I shall look carefully at that; and at any information that he wants to give me beforehand. *[Interruption.]* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is shouting from behind me, "What about the Spice Girls?".

Care in the Community

16. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about care in the community in Angus and Perth and Kinross; and if he will make a statement. [8147]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We have received representations from service users, independent sector providers and my hon. Friend, which led to an inspection of community care services in Angus and Perth and Kinross. The report was published on 14 November.

Mr. Walker: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Will he confirm that the report showed clearly that the quality of service in the private sector and the local government sector was exactly the same, but that the private sector was £200 per head per week cheaper? Consequently, if the private sector had been used, many more places would have been available, bed blocking in the health service would have been greatly reduced, and the whole service would have operated much more effectively—not just in Perth and Kinross and Angus, but throughout Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. The main finding was that those authorities could achieve long-term savings totalling between £3 million and £6 million by making more use of the independent care sector. We are to introduce directions on information which will require authorities to make public the costs of care in different sectors. I can also confirm that the Secretary of State recently announced an additional £15 million for health boards to reduce pressures that are likely to arise over the winter.

Electronic Tagging

17. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the effectiveness of electronic tagging for convicted offenders. [8148]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Representations on this matter were made by 18 of those who responded to

our "Crime and Punishment" White Paper, and we are still receiving representations in connection with our consultation paper on electronic monitoring of young offenders.

Mr. Brazier: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that any assessment of the usefulness of tagging in all parts of the United Kingdom must be based not on considerations of the civil liberties of the convicted offenders but on its effectiveness in preventing future crime and hence its impact on the community and especially on the victims of the crimes?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend. Punishment and deterrence are importance. This is a useful disposal. Under the English pilot schemes, curfew orders have been made—most often for burglary, theft, driving while disqualified, possession of drugs and some violent offences. The initial findings are that the pilot schemes have been successful. We believe that this will be a useful disposal for the courts—to ensure, for instance, that football hooligans are restricted to certain areas.

Employment (Eastwood)

18. **Mr. Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the latest estimate of employment and unemployment in the Eastwood constituency. [8149]

Mr. Kynoch: The figures announced today show that 10.1 per cent. of the work force in the Eastwood constituency were registered unemployed and claiming benefit in November. This shows a fall of 9.7 per cent. since November 1995 and confirms the extent to which Eastwood, like the rest of the country, is benefiting from the Government's very successful economic policies.

Mr. Stewart: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving the House and my constituents those extremely encouraging figures. Does he agree that they show the sustained improvement in employment trends throughout my constituency, in large measure due to the expanding small firms and self-employed sector? Does he further agree that that expansion would be wholly undermined by the increases in business rates threatened by the Labour party?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on that. The policies of the Opposition parties would be counter-productive to the future success of small businesses. That is recognised by the small business owners whom I meet as I go around the country.

Mr. Home Robertson: Given that a number of people from Eastwood work at Scottish Power's headquarters in Cathcart, just as a number of my constituents work at Scottish Power's Cockenzie power station, will the Minister acknowledge that it is vital for the people of Eastwood and of East Lothian that the interconnector between Scotland and Northern Ireland should be constructed, in the interests of both Northern Ireland and Scotland? Will the Secretary of State therefore withdraw the ridiculous, unwarranted and unprecedented conditions that he has attached to the route across south Ayrshire so that this vital project can go ahead in the interests of people on both sides of the Irish sea?

Mr. Foulkes *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman should look to his left at the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), who was shaking his head throughout the hon. Gentleman's comments. That is yet another split between Opposition Members which I hope the whole House has recognised.

Mr. Beggs: Despite the reply that the Minister has given, does he accept that there are economic benefits for constituents in Eastwood and elsewhere in Scotland if interconnection happens: that jobs will be secured in Scotland, that new jobs will be created, and that we in Northern Ireland will have security of supply and real competition to bring down electricity prices to domestic and industrial consumers, thereby benefiting both Scotland and Northern Ireland?

Mr. Kynoch: Of course I recognise what the hon. Gentleman says, and he will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has stated that he is minded to accept the interconnector, with the condition that four sections should be undergrounded. My right hon. Friend has put that proposal out to swift consultation with interested parties, and responses have to be in by 20 December. Once the responses have been received, my right hon. Friend will reconsider the issue. I am sure that he has heard what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Public Interest Immunity

3.30 pm

The Attorney–General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the future of public interest immunity in relation to Government documents as it operates in England and Wales, in the light of the consultation following publication of the Scott report. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor is making a similar statement in another place.

The Government are committed to the principle that there should be the maximum disclosure consistent with protecting essential public interests. The House will recall that the law that prevailed at the time of the Matrix Churchill case was further developed by the House of Lords case of ex parte Wiley in July 1994. Since that case, Ministers have had a gener al discretion to disclose documents without the prior approval of the court, if they consider that to be in the overall public interest.

Against that background, it is the view of Sir Richard Scott that legislation on public interest immunity is neither necessary nor desirable, and the Government agree. Public interest immunity is needed because of the potential conflict between two important public interests—the clear public interest in the administration of justice, which in a criminal case is the fair trial of an accused, and what is sometimes also the clear public interest in the confidentiality of certain documents or information.

The House will bear in mind the fact that the so-called immunity is subject to the ruling of the court, and that, in a criminal case, when Government documents are in issue, the judge himself examines any such document and makes the actual decision on disclosure in the light of the facts of the case.

In their proposals for the future, the Government have had particular regard both to the recommendations of Sir Richard Scott and to the many responses received during the consultation process. The Government's conclusions represent a new approach, which is set out in a paper today being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Under the new approach, Ministers will focus directly on the damage that disclosure would cause. The former division into class and contents claims will no longer be applied. Ministers will claim public interest immunity only when it is believed that disclosure of a document would cause real damage or harm to the public interest.

That new approach constitutes a change in the practice to be adopted by Ministers, but fully respects existing legal principles, as developed by the courts, and is subject to the supervision of the courts. It also accords with the view expressed by the present Lord Chief Justice that

"public interest immunity should only be claimed for the bare minimum of documents for which the claim of serious harm can be seen to be clearly justified".

The Government intend that the test shall be rigorously applied before any public interest immunity claim is made for any Government documents. It is impossible in advance to describe such damage exhaustively. The damage may relate to the safety of an individual, such as an informant, or to a regulatory process; or it may be damage to international relations caused by the disclosure of confidential diplomatic communications.

Normally it will be in the form of direct and immediate harm to, for example, the nation's economic interests or our relations with a foreign state. In some cases, it may be indirect or longer-term damage to which the disclosure of the material would contribute, as in the case of damage to a regulatory process. In any event, the nature of the harm will be clearly explained.

This new, restrictive approach will require, so far as possible, the way in which disclosure could cause real damage to the public interest to be clearly identified. Public interest immunity certificates will in future set out in greater detail than before both what the document is and what damage its disclosure would be likely to do—unless to do so would itself cause the damage that the certificate aims to prevent. That will allow even closer scrutiny of claims by the court, which is always the final arbiter.

The new emphasis on the test of serious harm means that Ministers will not, for example, claim PII to protect either internal advice or national security material merely by pointing to the general nature of the document. The only basis for claiming PII will be a belief that disclosure will cause real harm.

In relation to national security, the Government's approach takes into account the types of information that Parliament defined as sensitive in the Intelligence Services Act 1994, although, as I have said, a document will not attract PII simply because it falls into a pre-defined category. Many public interest immunity claims are not the responsibility of Government. Although the Government believe that their approach can be applied more widely, the paper placed in the Library only restricts Government claims.

I am grateful to all those who have contributed to the debate and taken the trouble to respond to the consultation exercise in this complex area. A combination of the revised regime laid down by the House of Lords in ex parte Wiley and the Government's new approach should ensure that PII claims will be significantly less frequent in future. I repeat that any claim in a criminal case will always, in the end, be subject to review by the court itself.

I believe that those factors, combined with the new test based on serious damage, which I have described and which is set out more fully in the paper today being placed in the Library of each House, provide what should prove a sensible, balanced and effective regime for the future; and I commend it to the House.

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): I am grateful to the Attorney-General for coming to the House to explain the Government's conclusions on the consultations that he set up as long ago as last February—although it has taken a little time. The House will also need time to react properly, and to study his paper that is now in the Library.

First, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that the application of his conclusions to Ministers will not affect the run-of-the-mill informant case and the need to protect such information? Secondly, will he clarify whether—and, if so, where—he departs from the substance of Sir Richard Scott's conclusions? Thirdly, does the abolition of the distinction between class and a contents claim mean effectively—particularly in criminal cases—that only contents claims will be made in future, whatever label they may or may not have?

Fourthly, when the Attorney-General refers to a claim being made only where there is real damage or harm to the public interest, does that mean the same as Lord Templeman meant in Wiley's case when he referred to "substantial" harm to the public interest?

Fifthly, do the Attorney-General's conclusions in adopting Wiley mean that the effect is a wholly new approach by Government? Does he expect that the claims will be made only rarely in criminal cases, and that Ministers will have to judge for themselves in each particular case whether to claim and the width of such a claim, having regard to the possibility of editing?

Sixthly, I welcome the right hon. and learned Gentleman's response to Scott. Ministers should have more time to consider their position, and should not have to consider matters overnight, which was the position in which the right hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel–Jones) was placed.

Having had a little experience of the urgency of dealing with red boxes, may I ask how this will operate in practice? What is the bottom line of this new approach? Will the more rigorous approach in civil or criminal cases, together with the effect of new legislation, radically reduce the number of claims? Will claims be made only in exceptional cases, after personal examination by Ministers and, where appropriate, a further check by the courts?

Lastly, can we properly anticipate that, when the liberty of the subject is involved, and when a person may go to gaol or receive other punishment, the chances of a wrong decision will be virtually eliminated? When second thoughts occur about a decision that is adverse to an individual, will the Attorney-General instruct those prosecuting to have no hesitation in withdrawing a criminal case, at whatever stage, if documents that may be of assistance to the defence have been withheld?

The Attorney–General: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for the welcome that he gave to the substance of the report, and for the way in which he put his questions, which I shall answer in the order in which he raised them.

I confirm that the new approach will not affect run-of-the-mill cases. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has had great experience in that area, and he knows that, in non-government cases involving police reports, informants and so on, the system works well. Although the courts may choose to adopt some of the practices that the Government are adopting, that will be a matter for them. Those practices will not be forced on them, and I expect the system to continue much as before in run-of-the-mill cases.

Secondly, I confirm that the departure from the previous position relates to the old distinction between class and contents claims and the new emphasis on real harm or real damage. It is not helpful to say that they are all contents claims rather than class claims. Class reasoning may be said to operate in some claims. If that is so, it will be clearly explained in the certificate. In every case, the Minister will have to be satisfied that real harm—which is the same as serious harm or serious damage—would be caused.

That brings me to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's fourth point, about whether "real damage" means the same as "substantial harm". In the words of Lord Templeman in the ex parte Wiley case, the straight answer is yes.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's next question was whether there will be fewer such cases in future, following the new approach and the ex parte Wiley case in 1994. He made that point in a number of forms in his last three questions. The straight answer is that I believe that there will be significantly fewer cases.

In fact, the change in the law declared in ex parte Wiley was extremely helpful, because it gave Ministers a discretion where previously there had been an element of rigidity through the need to leave anything except a clear case to the court. For that reason, the number of occasions after 1994 on which public interest immunity certificates had to be used by Ministers was already lower. I am confident that the number will continue to be low in future.

I confirm that the approach is more rigorous. We recognise the importance of giving adequate time. The right hon. and learned Gentleman rightly referred to that: he knows something of the pressures, and I claim to know something of them myself. As the courts in recent criminal cases always looked at the documents, the chances of a miscarriage of justice were happily small.

I can assure the right hon. and learned Gentleman, first, that the court will always continue to see such documents in criminal cases, and secondly that it is one of the key tenets of the prosecution always to keep any prosecution under review. If material emerges that shows that a prosecution ought not to continue, it will then be stopped.

Sir Archibald Hamilton (Epsom and Ewell): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on introducing measures that will certainly give public interest immunity certificates a much better public image. He told us, however, that the judge would make the decision on disclosure. In the light of that, can he tell us whether there have been any miscarriages of justice as a result of the issue of ministerial public interest immunity certificates?

The Attorney–General: I am certainly not aware that any miscarriages of justice have arisen from the issue of a ministerial public interest immunity certificate.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North–East): I welcome what the Attorney-General has told the House, so far as it follows the recommendations in chapter 5 of Sir Richard Scott's report. Can he confirm, however, that, notwithstanding his announcement today, if the procedures that he has outlined had been in place at the time Ministers, could well have signed public interest immunity certificates in the Matrix Churchill case?

Will the Attorney-General also tell the House what his role is to be hereafter? He will recall that Sir Richard Scott was critical of a failure on his part to advise prosecuting counsel to advise, in turn, the judge in the Matrix Churchill case of the reservations of the then President of the Board of Trade when he was called on to sign public interest immunity certificates. Where in the proposals that the Attorney-General has outlined today are the procedures to prevent that from happening again in the future?

The Attorney–General: The hon. and learned Gentleman asked whether, under the new procedure, Ministers might still have signed public interest immunity

[The Attorney–General]

certificates in the Matrix Churchill case. Yes, I expect that there would have been some certificates. They would have covered fewer documents, but they would have been perfectly properly signed—as, indeed, they were properly perfectly signed under the law as it stood at the time.

That brings me to the hon. and learned Gentleman's second question. There was a disagreement between SirRichard Scott and myself as to the law that was understood at the time. Sir Richard clearly and courteously set out his findings in his report.

On that issue, the House will recall—certainly it will be recalled by the hon. and learned Gentleman, who will have read the report of the debates in the House of Lords—that, while there has been no judicial ruling on the matter, all six Law Lords and former Law Lords who participated in the debate took the view of the law that I had given, and expressly endorsed it. Lord Ackner made that abundantly clear in another place.

Sir Richard Scott himself was good enough—in the House, before the Public Service Committee in May—to make it clear that points made by Lord Ackner, who said that he might have failed to distinguish between the law as it then stood and the law as he thought that it ought to have been, perhaps contained an element of truth. I am very grateful to Sir Richard for saying that.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on getting it right over Matrix Churchill, and welcome the clarification, simplification and improvement of a very complicated area of the law as far as Ministers are concerned. Will he, however, reassure the public that, at the end of the day, it will still be up to the good sense of an independent judiciary to decide whether a public interest immunity certificate should be upheld?

The Attorney–General: My hon. and learned Friend makes a crucial point, which applied in the Matrix Churchill case and applies today. In any criminal case in which public interest immunity is claimed by a Minister of the Crown, the judge will always see the documents, and in the end it will be the judge who decides whether there is any question of withholding such a document from disclosure.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I am grateful to the Attorney-General, who has thrown a very positive light on the issue of public interest immunity certificates, but may I turn his attention to his other responsibility, as Attorney-General for Northern Ireland?

May I ask about the role of public interest immunity certificates in coroners courts in Northern Ireland? Will coroners there have the same powers in relation to those certificates as an ordinary member of the judiciary? As juries' verdicts in Northern Ireland are based on evidence, the withholding of information by either the Royal Ulster Constabulary or the Ministry of Defence from coroners' juries can cause severe damage not only to the public interest but to the interests of individuals in Northern Ireland.

The Attorney–General: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware, law and practice in Northern Ireland have developed differently, as indeed they have in Scotland. That is why I was careful to say at the beginning of my statement that the new approach that I have set out applies to England and Wales. The law will continue to be developed in Northern Ireland by the judiciary.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I invite my right hon. and learned Friend to see whether we can change the language, and start to describe these certificates as public interest disclosure certificates, which in effect is what they have become. Will he confirm that, up to Wiley and up to the Scott report, the law and procedure had been set only by judges and not by Ministers or Parliament? Will he also confirm that, in future, the advice of Law Officers to Ministers will be on the basis of a public announcement following a review, as today, or to guide Ministers with the words of judges, as in the past?

The Attorney–General: I understand my hon. Friend's point about nomenclature, but, albeit that "public interest immunity certificate" is not particularly illuminating, "public interest disclosure certificate" might not be much more so. My hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not adopt that suggestion. I can confirm that, up to and including the decision in Wiley and since, the law in this area is judge-made. My statement changes practice only in relation to Government documents which are the subject of certificates by Ministers. My hon. Friend is right: the law in this area will continue to be judge-made.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Perhaps the Attorney-General can explain. I think that this all arose because a number of Ministers said that they had to sign these public interest immunity certificates when there was a prospect of people being sent to gaol. Their defence was, "Look, the Attorney-General told us to sign them." The then President of the Board of Trade had a different view; he said, "Hold on a bit—I'm not too sure about this prospect."

The net result, from what I have heard the Attorney-General say—he can tell me if I am wrong—is that, in similar circumstances where some people could possibly go to gaol, he or another Attorney-General could go to Ministers and say, "Look here, you had better sign these documents." Would they be expected to sign them, or would the Heseltine theory apply? What has really changed? Let us cut all the cackle and hear what the situation is all about.

The Attorney–General: That is a helpful question, from a seeker after truth. The first point that the hon. Gentleman will want confirmed is that there has been no question whatever of suppression in relation to public interest immunity certificates. The whole notion that they were "gagging orders"—a phrase which I might have heard trip off the hon. Gentleman's lips occasionally—

Mr. Skinner: No, I used it last time.

The Attorney–General: I know, but the hon. Gentleman knows better now, and he is not using that language.

They were never "gagging orders", and they are not "gagging orders". If Matrix Churchill were being re-run now, it would be possible for a Minister to have discretion to volunteer disclosure when he felt that the documents

could be disclosed even when it was not a clear case in which they were found to be disclosed on any balance of the public interest. Consequently, whether my right hon. Friend would have had to make a certificate at all, or whether he could have made one in relation to many fewer documents, which I believe is likely, is a moot point. It would certainly have been a great many fewer documents.

A combination of the decision in ex parte Wiley and the new approach in my statement will, as I said when I was rightly questioned by the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon, lead to many fewer such certificates, covering far fewer such documents in future.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): May I give sincere thanks to my right hon. and learned Friend for what I believe to have been the widest consultation on this topic? Is it not correct that every lawyer who has ever had anything to do with PII certificates was invited to contribute to the consultation process?

Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the abolition of the class and contents claims announced today will eliminate any chance of injustice in future? Does he also agree that the clear explanation that he has described and that will appear in future certificates will also reduce the possibilities of injustice?

Finally, will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the abolition of the blanket use of national security, in line with the evidence given by David Bickford to the Matrix Churchill inquiry, will be abolished? Is that not precisely in line with the undertaking to me and to the House by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster seven minutes, or whenever it was, before the end of the Matrix Churchill debate?

The attorney-general: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome. Taking his last point first, yes, that does fulfil the undertaking of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to my hon. Friend. As part of the consultation, I considered carefully what he had said on the matter, and it has been taken into account, along with the responses from others. I am grateful for his welcome for the clear explanation that will appear in any such certificate, for the ending of the often confusing apparent distinction between class and contents claims, and for the new concentration on real or substantial harm.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I welcome today's proposals, but does the Attorney-General agree that one of the problems is that documents are often considered at the beginning of a trial, when perhaps their full meaning is not fully understood by the tribunal trying the matter? Therefore, would it not be right—will not the Attorney-General give this undertaking—for Law Officers to continue to monitor cases in which documents or ministerial certificates are granted, to ensure that, if the court has misunderstood the full purport of the documents, the officers will intervene and seek to redress that fact?

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman makes interesting points. I expect cases of difficulty to come to the Law Officers. I would not expect every case to come to them as a matter of routine. One of the advantages of the system in a criminal case whereby the judge sees the documents, if they are in issue, at the beginning of the case, is that the judge himself will have in mind the possibility that they may become relevant when they had not initially seemed relevant.

The House will recall that, in the Matrix Churchill case, Judge Smedley initially saw the national security documents. When he first saw them, and heard argument, they did not appear to him to be relevant. Counsel for Mr. Henderson then made it clear that Mr. Henderson was saying that he was an agent of the intelligence services. The judge considered the documents again, and changed his view the following day. That is a short-order example of what could happen after a longer period in another case. That is what the hon. Gentleman has in mind.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the label "ministerial gagging order", which the press have attached to PII certificates, is misleading nonsense—like so much else in the newspapers—for the very reason that the effect of that so-called gagging order is to place the documents in question before the trial judge, so that he can decide whether those documents should or should not be admitted into evidence?

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Anyone who wished to suppress something would be mad to attach it to a PII certificate, because he would know that, in a criminal case, putting those documents in front of the judge would be the first thing that would happen. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the expression "gagging order" should not be used. It should not have been used in the past. It has grossly misled the public, and it should not be used in future.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What would have been the position under the new dispensation of Alan Moses QC? Will the Attorney-General reflect on paragraph G13.119 of the Scott report, which states:

"I question the propriety of instructing counsel 'to seek to avoid the disclosure of documents'".

It goes on:

"The authority would not have been forthcoming from Mr. Heseltine . . . The process of seeking the requisite instructions would have exposed the impossible position in which the Treasury Solicitor and Mr. Moses were placed, namely, representing Departments with different views."

Will the House have an opportunity to discuss this after looking at the statement and the documents? Have the views of Professor Anthony Bradley, who wrote a long article in the journal *Public Law* been taken into account?

The Attorney-General: A great many learned and academic comments have been made on this matter, and, as far as possible, they have been taken into account, but I will not comment on one particular contribution.

I shall now deal with the position of counsel in the case, Mr. Alan Moses, now Mr. Justice Moses, and the fact that he might have been in an impossible position. One of the points that will be considered carefully for the future, and which has been considered in the past on occasion, is whether prosecuting counsel is sufficiently equipped to present arguments on behalf of one Department which may be in conflict with another. That was an interesting and important point made by Sir Richard Scott, and it will be borne in mind carefully in future.

[The Attorney–General]

In this case, it is not correct to say that Mr. Alan Moses was ever seeking to avoid disclosure, in the sense of seeking to suppress anything. He was arguing in good faith—I do not think that anybody has suggested otherwise, and I would challenge them strongly if they did—that the documents were not necessary or relevant to the issues as he saw them, and that he did not believe that they were bound to be disclosed. Had he believed that they were bound to be disclosed, they would have been disclosed, and I would not have had to advise my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to make his certificate.

The House should be crystal clear. Every such document was put clearly before Judge Smedley. He read every document attached to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister's certificate and to the certificates of other Ministers during the argument before the case began, and he made his decision even before the case began. The case did not collapse but ran for four weeks, until it was withdrawn by prosecuting counsel—in accordance with the points made to me by the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) and the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham)—in exercise of his function of fairness as prosecuting counsel.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Apparently, both sides of the House now agree with open government and with the fact that we have the best civil service in the world. If we are to retain a civil service which is unpoliticised and impartial, it must be confident that advice given to Ministers, particularly that given by private secretaries to Ministers, will be protected unless there is a danger of miscarriage of justice. Can my right hon. and learned Friend reassure civil servants that our traditional way of doing things will be maintained?

The Attorney–General: My hon. Friend has put his finger on one of the trickiest issues, which is the extent to which documents relating to advice to Ministers should be withheld. What I have made clear today is that documents relating to advice to Ministers will be judged by the same test as documents in the category of national security and various other categories, which is whether disclosure would cause serious harm to the public interest. They will have to pass that test. If they can—I can conceive of circumstances in which they would—they would be entitled to protection, subject of course to the overriding views of the judge, to whom they would be shown and who would make his decision after argument.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): As the Attorney-General has said that judges will remain the final arbiters in those matters, will there be any right of appeal against a judge's decision? Unless there is, yet another legal anomaly would seem to be created whereby there is no right of appeal against an individual judge's decision. Under the new arrangements, will the presumption be that Ministers will seek the advice of the Attorney-General in those matters, or that the Attorney-General will offer Ministers such advice?

The Attorney–General: I shall take the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question first. I should expect—this will be the guidance given to the public service—that cases of difficulty, but not every case, will be referred to the Law Officers for advice.

On the first question, if the trial judge decides that a document should not be disclosed, there will, at the end of the case, be an ultimate right of appeal. The general rule in Crown court trials, which I think would apply in this instance, is that the trial judge's ruling on an interlocutory matter of this nature in the case is final at that moment. One could not rush off to the Court of Appeal on the matter at that stage.

If I have mistaken the position in any way, however, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman, as he has raised an interesting point of law, and place a copy of the letter in the Library. But, at the conclusion of the case, if one believed that an injustice had arisen, it would be a ground of appeal.

Mr. Rod Richards (Clwyd, North–West): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the new PII regime will guarantee protection of sensitive intelligence sources, both human and technical?

The Attorney–General: Broadly, the answer to my hon. Friend's question is yes. He has posited a very sensitive source, which would normally require protection. In such cases, if the information were essential to a fair trial, the prosecution would have to decide either to disclose the information and to proceed with the trial, or to drop the trial to protect the source. The system provides a method of proper protection for such security information, although occasionally it may be necessary to drop a trial to protect the source.

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, West): May I press the Minister further on the issue of ministerial responsibility? As a non-lawyer, I was wondering whether he could explain who in government is responsible as the final arbiter of whether public interest immunity should be claimed? Is it the relevant Secretary of State, or is it the Attorney-General? Is there not an obligation to adhere to the advice of the Attorney-General?

The Attorney–General: The ultimate responsibility is the Minister's, but the Minister will act on advice. If the advice is cogent and appears to be in accordance with the law as it is then understood, the Minister will be likely to follow it, as my right hon. Friend followed the advice that I gave him on that specific occasion. Ultimate responsibility for a decision on whether to claim public interest immunity belongs to the Minister. In future, as I have explained, the matter will be a lot easier, because, first, after ex parte Wiley, the Minister has a much wider discretion; and, secondly, the new approach focuses the mind so very clearly on the test of real harm.

Points of Order

4.8 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I apologise for giving you only relatively short notice of my point of order, but it is on a serious matter that has been brought to my attention. Yesterday, I tabled four questions. The first was to the Lord Chancellor's Department, asking whether the new Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland had ever been a Mason or a member of the Orange Order.

The other three questions were to the Home Office. Two were on the intolerable strip searches to which Miss Rosaleen McAliskey has been subjected in Holloway prison, and the fourth was on why prisoners may receive *The Times* but not *The Irish Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* but not the *Belfast Telegraph*, the *Daily Mail* but not the *Irish News*, and *The Sun* but not the *News Letter*.

Those questions were accepted—although not in that form—by the Table Office and were sent to the Stationery Office, where they were received by those appointed by the House to accept and to check such questions.

Those questions did not appear on the Order Paper. When I asked at the Table Office—I apologise again for giving such short notice—I was informed that they had been lost by the privatised HMSO. In my experience of almost 31 years as a Member of Parliament, that has never happened before. Those at the Table Office were most apologetic, but the matter was not their responsibility.

My point of order is to ask whether you, as Speaker and therefore champion of the House and protector of our rights, have received an apology from the newly privatised HMSO for that flagrant dereliction of its duty, and whether apologies will be received by the other hon. Members who suffered as a result of that dereliction. How shall we be protected in future? We table questions not only for our interests, but for the interests of the general public and those asking us to make their opinions and voices known.

Madam Speaker: I had some indication of this matter only while I have been in the Chair since 2.30 pm, so I have not been able to follow through any investigations. The hon. Gentleman is correct in saying that several questions—not only from him but from other hon. Members—were missing. As far as I can understand, this is an unprecedented lapse. I assure him that, as soon as it was noticed, investigations were put under way.

The hon. Gentleman can be assured that, as soon as I have the opportunity this afternoon when I leave the Chair, I shall want to follow through personally on the investigations to see what happened. The hon. Gentleman and the other hon. Members, whose identities I am not aware of at this stage, will certainly receive an apology. We must learn from these mistakes.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): On a different point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware of the controversy that arose last night as a result of the votes in the House on Monday evening. There appears to have been nothing less than a conspiracy to pervert the outcome of the votes. If such behaviour goes on with impunity, does it not give a green light to people to follow similar practices in future? Surely the matter should be referred to the Committee of Privileges.

Madam Speaker: Similar points of order have been put to me yesterday and this morning. The Speaker has no business involving herself in the arrangements between the political parties in the House. It is not the business of the Speaker to become involved in such matters.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. At 12.30 pm today, the Leader of the House gave an interim report on the appalling events in Lima last night, saying, among other things, that British subjects could be involved. As the issue involves the safety of embassies around the world and the problems of copycat action, it is a matter of considerable importance, not only to Japan and Peru. Have you received a request from the Government to make a statement on the issues?

Madam Speaker: The direct answer is no, I have not, but of course we still have the day's proceedings to go through. Should the Government feel it necessary or right to make a statement, we can always deal with that later in the day.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): On a different point of order, Madam Speaker—please excuse my voice. May I express to you, in your role as the much valued and respected protector of all Members of Parliament, my concern about developments in the business of the House over the past 10 days?

On 5 December, reported in column 1203 of *Hansard*, the Leader of the House said—we appreciate the fact that he now gives us much longer notice of business—that there would be a debate on the Protection from Harassment Bill. It was agreed through the usual channels that the debate would last only one day. That seemed appropriate, because it would have allowed me to attend the inaugural meeting of the Highlands and Islands Convention.

On 12 December, the Leader of the House announced that there would be a debate on the common fisheries policy. I challenged that—as reported in column 425 of *Hansard*—because every hon. Member from the highlands and islands of Scotland has a clear interest in the common fisheries policy, which has implications for our constituencies. I understand from my investigations that it was subsequently decided through the usual channels that two days would be required to discuss the Protection from Harassment Bill, but I had no notification of that, as a Member of Parliament from the highlands and islands.

I had to make a difficult decision on Monday. Fortunately, there was no fog or frost, and we managed to get back to Westminster via normal channels, without having to charter a Royal Air Force plane, in order to vote.

Would you, Madam Speaker, look at the conflicting responsibilities that are placed on individual Members? The issue did not concern individual constituencies; it was a general issue for all Members of Parliament from the highlands and islands. What action can be taken to ensure that we are never placed in the same ludicrous position again, especially in the light of subsequent events? As you know, I had raised points on the matter in the House before those events occurred.

Madam Speaker: I very well remember the hon. Lady raising the issue in business questions. As she will appreciate, the matter is for the usual channels,

[Madam Speaker]

particularly the Leader of the House. I very much understand that some Members have responsibilities—parliamentary, not constituency responsibilities—outside the House. I take to heart what she has said this afternoon, and shall make it my business to talk the Leader of the House to see what can be done, so that hon. Members are not placed in such a position in future.

ROYAL ASSENT

Madam Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Act 1996.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act 1996.

Theft (Amendment) Act 1996.

Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office Act 1996.

City of Edinburgh Council Order Confirmation Act 1996.

Edinburgh Merchant Company Order Confirmation Act 1996.

Scottish Borders Council (Jim Clark Memorial Rally) Order Confirmation Act 1996.

Western Isles Council (Berneray Causeway) Order Confirmation Act 1996.

BILL PRESENTED

Sex Offenders

Mr. Secretary Howard, supported by Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew, Mr. Secretary Forsyth and Mr. David Maclean, presented a Bill to require the notification of information to the police by persons who have committed certain sexual offences; to make provision with respect to the commission of certain sexual acts outside the United Kingdom; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday 13th January, and to be printed [Bill 66].

Companies (Millennium Computer Compliance)

4.16 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require companies to conduct an audit of the capacity of their computer systems to deal with calendar dates after 31st December 1999 and to report both on those audits and on the actions their directors propose to take in consequence.

The aim of the Bill is to avoid for this country much of the widespread chaos and confusion that it is being increasingly predicted will occur throughout the world at the turn of the century, in just three years' time. I am grateful to hon. Members of all parties who have so willingly offered to sponsor it.

The cause of such Doomsday predictions is the inability of the majority of computer systems to recognise 2000. That is because they use, as we all do, two digits for the year of the date instead of four. Thus, today's date is written as 18/12/96, rather than 18/12/1996.

Unless they are properly reprogrammed, computer systems will recognise 2000 as 1900, or simply reset to some other date. That will mean that they will no longer deliver what they are programmed to deliver, and because so much of our daily lives depend on computers, the result will be, to use a tabloid word, catastrophe. As no one who has looked into the bizarre problem in any detail has so far suggested otherwise, the matter must be of urgent concern to the House.

When the matter was first raised on the Floor of the House in my question to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister just a year ago, it was greeted with expressions of ridicule and disbelief. One year later, many written questions to Ministers in every Department, follow-up questions where appropriate, and my Adjournment debate on 6 June have contributed to increasing coverage in specialist computer magazines and the national press.

Many hon. Members are now aware of the issue, and realise that there is a real problem that must be addressed. I especially appreciate the interest of the hon. Members who attended my briefing meeting last Wednesday, and the fact that the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology has issued a briefing note, No. 89, on "Computer Systems and the Millennium". That is in the Library, and I recommend it as essential background reading.

The briefing note refers to some of the forecasts of the danger of failure to ensure that computer systems are millennium-compliant. Consequences could include payroll systems collapsing so that workers cannot be paid; financial records losing track of investments; invoicing systems failing to generate bills, or charging 100 years' worth of interest; telecommunications networks failing; and problems with supply in utilities such as gas and electricity.

We must also take into account the possible unpredictable behaviour of embedded microchip systems in places such as elevators, bank vaults and medical equipment, and in Government systems such as those responsible for benefit payments, for maintaining criminal and medical records and for revenue collection.

In response to my Adjournment debate in June, my hon. Friend the Minister for Science and Technology talked about the action that the Government were taking on their

computer systems—which are not, of course, the concern of my Bill. He also mentioned the Government initiatives to encourage awareness of the problem in the private sector. Those include establishing TaskForce 2000, in co-operation with the Confederation of British Industry and the Computing Services and Software Association.

My hon. Friend gave the House two especially telling warnings during my Adjournment debate. He said:

"some companies will go out of business if they have not tackled the problem, or not ensured that their suppliers have tackled it . . . it is a management problem that must be dealt with at the top . . . The Government cannot do it for them. It is no use companies coming to us in 1999 and saying, 'The Government have not fixed it.' The Government did not install the computer software. Failure to deal with the problem could lead to commercial collapse".—[*Official Report*, 6 June 1996; Vol. 278, c. 818-9.]

My Bill is designed to avoid such commercial collapse. Even responsible companies that have taken the necessary action will find that others with which they have dealings, such as their suppliers, will not have taken action, which will make all those in the supply chain vulnerable to business failure. Truly the chain will be only as strong as its weakest link. I do not believe that all the warning, advising and cajoling in the world will be enough to ensure that the new millennium will begin trouble-free.

Like the Government, I do not want more regulation and red tape to be imposed upon businesses. Some concern has been expressed that my Bill might add to the many burdens that already fall on them. However, it should not add to the burden, because it merely clarifies an existing duty for directors of companies and their auditors to give shareholders in the annual report a true and fair assessment of the company as a going concern for the foreseeable future.

As the future is uncertain, that usually means looking no further than 12 to 15 months ahead. However, the effects of the unique problem that I am talking about can be assessed now, and a view taken on whether the company will be a going concern in the year 2000 if action is not taken now. Indeed, action must be taken now. It will be no use trying to solve the problem in 1999. Most information technology projects take several years to implement, and this will be the largest information technology project that firms will ever have undertaken.

For instance, British Telecom intends to spend hundreds of millions of pounds simply to ensure that its telecommunications system will work in three years' time. Auditors who sign company accounts for the financial year 1997-98 and beyond will leave themselves liable to legal action by shareholders of firms that go out of business because they did not take action in time.

My Bill is designed to avoid the prospect of huge numbers of legal cases in the new millennium, with costly attempts to determine who is to blame for companies' failure.

The Bill will require companies to conduct audits of the capacity of their computer systems to deal with calendar dates after 31 December 1999 and to report both on the audit and the actions that their directors propose to take in consequence. It is an amendment of the Companies Act 1985, which is the principal company statute in force, and of the duty to prepare a director's report. Both obligations are placed on directors rather than companies.

If the House were to allow me to introduce the Bill today, there may be enough time for it to be given the Royal Assent in the spring, so that it could apply to company reports for the financial years ending in 1998 and 1999. That might be sufficient, with the work of TaskForce 2000 and other initiatives by the private sector and the computer industry, to avoid much of the incalculable chaos that is predicted if too little is done.

I accept that there is a cost to checking computer systems for their millennium compliance but the cost of non-compliance, which may mean going out of business, is far greater. This is a race against time. There are only 750 working days left. The problem is one of the greatest challenges facing business management. Like the change in the millennium, it cannot be avoided. That is why I hope that the House will give me leave to introduce the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Atkinson, Mr. Richard Caborn, Mr. Paul Channon, Sir John Cope, Mr. Tam Dalyell, Sir Anthony Durant, Sir Russell Johnston, Sir Dudley Smith, Rev. Martin Smyth, Mr. Stephen Timms, Mr. John Townend and Mr. Dafydd Wigley.

Companies (Millennium Computer Compliance)

Mr. David Atkinson accordingly presented a Bill to require companies to conduct an audit of the capacity of their computer systems to deal with calendar dates after 31st December 1999 and to report both on those audits and on the actions their directors propose to take in consequence: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 January, and to be printed [Bill 67].

Orders of the Day

Protection from Harassment Bill

Considered in Committee [Progress, 17 December].

[SIR GEOFFREY LOFTHOUSE *in the Chair*]

4.26 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): On a point of order, Mr. Lofthouse. As you know, last night, amendment No. 13 was passed by 179 to 172 votes, to strengthen the Bill. *[Interruption.]* I apologise, Sir Geoffrey. I think that yesterday the Chairman was adorned with a knighthood perhaps in anticipation of an event this Christmas; I was trying to correct myself.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department applauded our reasons for tabling amendment No. 13 and described its mover, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth), as having the best possible motives. The Minister's only objection was that our proposal was akin to punishment and not appropriate to civil courts. In view of that and the passage of the amendment, would it be for the convenience of the Committee for you to invite the Minister to explain the Government's intentions, especially as there is no time between Committee and Report?

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): Further to that point of order, Sir Geoffrey. It is not the Government's intention to hold up progress on the Bill. We wish it to reach another place as speedily as possible. We will therefore not today seek to overturn the amendment on Report. However, that we are courteous in commenting that Opposition amendments are not "born out of malice", or that we can "see some merit" in them, does not mean that it would be sensible to leave amendment No. 13 in the Bill. The Opposition spokesman should not confuse our customary courtesy in talking about the amendments with an assumption that we believe that there is considerable merit in them.

When we come to Third Reading, I shall explain briefly why we think that the amendment is not sensible. We shall seek in another place to remove it from the Bill, but we do not wish to take any action that would cause any delay to the Bill today.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick–upon–Tweed): Further to that point of order, Sir Geoffrey. Although I welcome the Minister's statement that he does not seek today to reverse the decision on the amendment, I hope that you will acknowledge that the procedures of the House are designed to enable Bills to be amended. Some of the comments by Conservative Members appear to suggest that the Government bring Bills before the House that are totally without fault and incapable of amendment. Were that so, we would not need any of those procedures and the Government would not have to come back with fresh legislation to correct mistakes.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is not a matter for the Chair.

Clause 3

CIVIL REMEDY

Amendment proposed [17 December]: No. 14, in page 2, line 8, at the end to insert the words—

'(2B) In considering whether to order an injunction in proceedings under this section, a court shall have primary regard to whether such an order is necessary for the protection of what the court considers are the victim's legitimate interests.'.—*[Ms Janet Anderson.]*

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

4.30 pm

The First Deputy Chairman: I remind the Committee that with this we are discussing the following amendments: No. 29, in page 2, line 8, at end insert—

'(2A) Civil proceedings which include a claim under this section for an injunction shall not be referred to arbitration (whether under section 64 of the County Courts Act 1984, or otherwise) without the consent of all the parties to the action.'.

No. 4, in page 2, leave out lines 9 to 24.

No. 25, in clause 8, page 4, line 36, at end insert—

'(5B) In considering whether to order an interdict or interim interdict in proceedings under this section, a court shall have primary regard to whether such an order is necessary for the protection of what the court considers are the pursuer's legitimate interests'.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I thought it right, as a courtesy to you, Sir Geoffrey, and to the Committee, to reappear to continue the speech that I started yesterday evening. I must say, however, that any thoughts that I had on amendments Nos. 14 and 25 have, with the passage of time, become a little cloudy. I cannot quite remember why I was so enthusiastic to address the Committee on them. Furthermore, I notice from the clock that I am due any second to chair the proceedings of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, so the Committee will be pleased to hear that I shall not detain it for long.

I shall detain it only long enough to make the observation that amendment No. 14 requires a court to have

"primary regard to whether"

an injunction

"is necessary for the protection of what the court considers are the victim's legitimate interests."

That seems to me to be nonsense, because it is totally unnecessary. Of course, any civil court considering an injunction will have primary regard to whether an injunction was necessary for the protection of the victim.

Amendment No. 25 invites the Scottish court to have primary regard to

"whether such an order is necessary for the protection of what the court considers are the pursuer's legitimate interests".

That is the stalker.

Mr. Beith: It is the plaintiff.

Sir Ivan Lawrence: That just shows the effect that the passage of a few hours and much political activity have upon the mind of even the acutest of lawyers who address hon. Members on such an important matter.

I am bound to conclude that, if the point on the Scottish interest advanced by Opposition Members is the same as that advanced by Opposition Members representing the English and Welsh interest, my observation about amendment No. 14 applies exactly to amendment No. 25. It is unnecessary to remind a court in a civil action for an injunction that its primary obligation is to have regard to the interests of the victim before making such an order.

In the climate of yesterday night, I intended to observe that, as the amendments were totally unnecessary and otiose, they must have been tabled either as probing ones—I understand that that was not the intention—or to waste time. As we are interested in maintaining an even keel between the parties, however, I shall forbear to repeat the observation that I intended to make last evening and satisfy myself with my observation about the totally unnecessary nature of amendments Nos. 14 and 25.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Gary Streeter): The debate on this group of amendments has been useful, lively and action-packed.

Amendment No. 14 could be intended to focus the court's mind on the needs of the victim or on the liberty of the defendant; but, either way, the amendment is unnecessary. The court will decide whether to make an injunction on the evidence produced by the victim and the defendant. If it finds that the victim's claim in respect of harassment is made out, it will include in any order that it makes whatever terms are appropriate for the necessary protection of the victim. It will also have in mind the need for any restraints that the order places on the defendant to be reasonable. A defendant who feels that the injunction contains terms that are not necessary for the protection of the victim or that are an unfair restraint may appeal against the order. The amendment therefore adds no benefit to the victim, the defendant or the powers of the court.

Amendment No. 29 seeks to ensure that civil claims in respect of harassment cannot be referred to arbitration without the consent of all parties. Section 64 of the County Courts Act 1984 enables rules to be made requiring the referral of county court cases to arbitration and, technically, harassment cases could be covered by those arrangements. It is, however, impossible to envisage circumstances in which referral to arbitration could be appropriate, because an arbitrator cannot grant an injunction—only the courts can do that.

The consent of the parties to arbitration is a rather hollow condition, because it would clearly be unpalatable to a victim who was seeking an injunction to accept a reference to arbitration. The effect would be to deny the victim's claim without hearing it. I hope that it goes without saying that there is no intention of introducing rules requiring harassment to be dealt with by arbitration, but, because it anticipates circumstances that it is impossible to conceive of, the amendment is unnecessary.

Amendment No. 4 is bad. The provisions that it cuts out of the Bill are part of the important protection that we seek to give to victims of harassment. The effect would be to place on the victim's shoulders the responsibility for collecting evidence of the breach and bringing the matter back to court. It may be that, in some cases, the victim would prefer to proceed against a defendant who breached a civil injunction by restoring the proceedings to the civil court and seeking the court's sanction for contempt; but the amendment would make that compulsory.

The amendment would also mean that, as long as the defendant remained at large, the harassment could continue. By contrast, the provisions that the amendment would delete would enable the police to act promptly and decisively on behalf of the victim—

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will the Minister confirm that the tests in civil courts are not nearly as strict as those in the criminal courts? In fact, injunctions can be granted without the person against whom the injunction is being sought being present in court. Is he confident that, under the procedure in the Bill of using a civil injunction and enforcing it through the criminal courts, the rights of the individual to know exactly what is occurring will be protected?

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that, in a criminal court, the test applied is "beyond all reasonable doubt", whereas in the civil courts it is "the balance of probabilities". One of the main reasons for introducing the civil tort is to gain access to that lesser test, so that more victims or potential victims might be protected. I am confident that the courts will always act in a way that protects the civil liberties of those involved in a case.

To return to the sentence that I was halfway through: by contrast, the provisions that the amendment would delete would enable the police to act promptly and decisively on behalf of the victim, to arrest a defendant who breaches an injunction and to investigate the circumstances of that breach and collect the necessary evidence. A defendant who does not breach the court's order has nothing to fear from those provisions, but deleting them substantially diminishes the protection that we want to give to victims.

Amendment No. 25 attempts to do for Scotland what amendment No. 14 would do for England and Wales, but interdict provides good protection for a victim or potential victim. For example, it can prohibit a stalker from taking a specific action, such as writing to the victim. Interdict is a remedy that is well used and familiar both to the courts and to those who need the protection that it can give. As a matter of course, in considering whether to grant interdict or interim interdict, a Scottish court would take fully into account the interests of the victim or potential victim. There is no need to place any further duty on the court, so, like amendment No. 14, amendment No. 25 is unnecessary.

I ask the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) to withdraw her amendment.

Ms Janet Anderson (Rossendale and Darwen): We have had a useful debate, and it is not our intention to delay the Committee, because we are anxious that the Bill should make speedy progress. When discussing these matters, it is important that we pay particular attention to the interests of victims. Nevertheless, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5

RESTRAINING ORDERS

Mr. Bennett: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 3, line 17, leave out

'or any other person mentioned in the order'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 8, in page 3, line 22, leave out 'or until further order'.

Mr. Bennett: I have two questions. Amendment No. 7 seeks to leave out the words:

"or any other person mentioned in the order".

Will that person have to consent to being included in the order?

Amendment No. 8 concerns how long the period should be. Are there not considerable advantages in having specific rather than indefinite periods, and would it not be better to define a period, however long, than to allow the order to run indefinitely?

Mr. Maclean: Amendment No. 7 would limit to victims of an offence defined in clauses 2 or 4 the protection afforded by a restraining order granted by a criminal court. Under the terms of the Bill, a court has the power to make an order to protect not only the victim, but any other person mentioned in the order. The amendment would prevent a court making an order to protect those, other than the victim, whom the court has reasonable grounds for believing that the stalker might attempt to harass. Most obviously, that would exclude from the scope of such an order the family, other co-habitees or close friends of the victim. I believe that we would all agree that that is unacceptable.

We are aware that some stalkers attempt to broaden their campaign of intimidation against a person by also contacting and approaching those whom the victim holds dear. The courts must have the power to protect such people with the restraining order, and, obviously, the courts must be aware that the person who is being protected is concerned and wants that protection.

I shall now discuss amendment No. 8. Clause 5(3) enables a court to make a restraining order for a specified period or until further notice. Allowing the court to make an order until such time as a further order is made is essential for the occasions when a court is not in a position to know, when it makes the order, how long it needs to be in force to have the desired effect.

It is not difficult to envisage such circumstances. If the stalking is extreme, the victim may need to be protected indefinitely. Allowing the courts to make an open-ended order, which clause 5(4) allows, to be discharged on the application of the prosecution, provides maximum flexibility to the courts to make an order for a period tailored to the circumstances of the case, and it prevents unnecessary hassle for the victim in having to return to the courts to have orders renewed—not that there is great expense involved in returning to renew them, but it is an unnecessary hassle, which could be avoided in some cases.

Mr. Bennett: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. Following last night's debate, certain issues have been left up in the air and we shall hear more when the Bill goes to the House of Lords. In view of that, it would not be sensible to discuss amendment No. 15, so I do not intend to move it.

Clause 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 6 and 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 8

HARASSMENT

Amendments made: No. 40, in page 4, line 11, leave out

', in respect of an actual breach of that subsection,'.

No. 41, in page 4, leave out line 35 and insert

'but a person may not be subjected to the same prohibitions in an interdict or interim'.—*[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton.]*

Clause 8, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 9 to 12 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 13

EXTENT

4.45 pm

Mrs. Helen Liddell (Monklands, East): I beg to move amendment No. 27, in page 7, leave out line 10 and insert—

'(1) Sections 1 and 2 extend to England and Wales and Scotland

(1A) Sections 3 to 7 extend to England and Wales only'.

The purpose of the amendment is to create a separate criminal offence in Scotland, although I regret to say that the Secretary of State for Scotland has said that he views it as a wrecking amendment. That is not our intention at all. We view it as an opportunity to correct some of the shortcomings which have become apparent in Scottish law and which will become even more obvious if the Bill receives Royal Assent and is implemented in England and Wales.

The subject matter of the debate has been gone over extensively in recent weeks in the House, when my hon. Friends the Members for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) and for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) have made broadly similar points in relation to the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill. I agree with what the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mrs. Maddock) said last night about the Government stretching the good will of Members of this House to the very limit. We have co-operated to the best of our ability to get the legislation on the statute book as quickly as possible, so it is regrettable that Scottish Office Ministers did not see fit to consult the Opposition on the aspects of the Bill that relate to Scots law. There are nevertheless a number of alterations that we would want to make to the Bill.

The situation in Scotland will be measurably different from that in England and Wales following enactment of the legislation. I should like to draw attention to the great success of my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson), whose persistent efforts have ensured that this legislation is before the Committee

today. The problem remains that men and women in Scotland will assume that there is a separate crime of stalking in Scotland even though there will be none.

Much has been made of the fact that the Scottish common law breach of the peace offence is supposedly sufficient to cover the crime of stalking or harassment. It is my contention—and that of a number of the victims of stalking—that that law is not in itself sufficient to deal with the problems created by such harassment. There is a tinge of complacency in the attitude of the Government and of some members of the legal profession when it comes to how the law on breach of the peace can operate in Scotland, and to the penalties that can be handed down as a result.

I stress that it is only because the official Opposition have done all in our power to get the Bill through as quickly as possible that we have managed to come thus far in less than 24 hours; it remains a matter of regret that the Bill's provisions will do little to change the law in Scotland. The Law Society of Scotland has written to the Minister responsible for home affairs and health at the Scottish Office, to say that it has considered the measure

"and notes that the Scottish clauses effectively restate, in modern terminology, the existing law which offers protection from harassment by way of assault."

It is important that we look further than the existing law in seeking to protect the victims of harassment in Scotland.

Not being a lawyer myself, I have taken advice from, among others, the university of Strathclyde department of law. I was interested in comments by Professor Alan Miller, a visiting professor at the university of Strathclyde and also the chairman of the Scottish Council for Civil Liberties. Professor Miller is of the view that, in so far as the Bill covers harassment, it does not add to existing remedies already available in Scots law, and he makes the important point—I ask the Committee to reflect on it seriously—that the Bill probably would not be used by practitioners, who would continue to seek interdicts.

I hope that the Minister will respond to Professor Miller's further point that, if the law were used, it would certainly have resource implications for a diminishing civil legal aid budget. The nature of the legislation is to seek civil redress for the person who has been subjected to harassment. The dictum from Dicey that justice is open to all, like the Ritz, applies as much in Scotland as it does south of the border. Those who have resources can take court action: those who do not have resources need to apply for legal aid. We already know that there is what could be described as a crisis in civil legal aid in Scotland. It is the view of the Law Society and of Professor Alan Miller that the Bill would not substantially alter the law in Scotland, and the Bill could also lull people into a false sense of security.

We have also to bear it in mind that one important aspect of the legislation, which has been mentioned by right hon. and hon. Members, is its deterrent impact. Many of the people who commit harassment or stalking do not believe that they are doing anything wrong. Some of them are psychologically disordered, but some think that they are doing nothing more than pursuing a vigorous courtship. The distress that they can cause to their victims is considerable and it needs to be made clear to people, by making it a separate offence, that stalking or harassment is an unacceptable form of behaviour. If that were done, it would be of enormous assistance to the police and the victims. In particular, Victim Support has made it clear that a separate crime would greatly assist the prosecution of those guilty of harassment.

I notice that the Government have drawn attention to the fact that, in Scotland, a specific statutory right to be free of harassment has been created. That right looks nice on paper, but it is the view of the eminent Scottish lawyer Alastair Bonnington, who is a lecturer in criminal procedure, that it is

"about as worthwhile as giving a woman a right not to be raped. It is no more than the expression of a pious hope that such conduct will cease."

It is important to give those who are victims of harassment and stalking a clear message that goes beyond a pious hope that such behaviour will end.

Scottish Members will be aware of two significant cases that have appeared before the Scottish courts recently. One relates to Ms Louise Durie, who lives in the Ayrshire village of Waterside and was, for nine months, vigorously pursued by her next-door neighbour. She suffered appalling harassment, as did her partner. The harassment was even made worse when charges were made against Mr. Pickering, who was the harasser, and he was released on bail and returned home to pursue his harassment. Louise Durie's experience was recounted extensively in the Scottish press. She came to believe that Scottish law—and, indeed, English law—should be changed immediately to make stalking a specific criminal offence with heavy penalties, in order to deter those who would make others suffer in the way that she had suffered. Ms Durie said that, although she had been through "months of hell", it appeared that the man involved faced only a short gaol term.

Ms Durie drew attention to the need for her tormentor to undergo a course of counselling—which he did not undertake—as a result of his offences. She recognised that he was in need of some psychological assistance. Ms Durie made a very important point in relation to the Secretary of State for Scotland, who she said

"cannot begin to imagine the living hell which victims go through. If he could, then legislation would be through in a flash."

It is often assumed that women are the only victims of stalking and harassment. However, another very important case in Scotland concerns a couple: Professor Reggie von Zugbach and his wife Susanna. They were the victims of a disturbed academic who was jealous of their marriage. In a letter to the von Zugbachs, he wrote:

"God has allowed you to go into this marriage with one purpose . . . namely to break you, because there is no other way."

The perpetrator was arrested in connection with the offences and charged with breach of the peace, but, when a file was returned from the procurator fiscal, it was marked "no further action". As a result of his experiences, Professor von Zugbach—who is an author, a former Army major and a lecturer in management studies at Paisley university—is campaigning for a change in the law governing stalking. If I describe some of the incidents that he suffered, I think that hon. Members will understand why.

Mrs. von Zugbach's ordeal began in 1992 when she rejected an approach from a man she had just met. Shortly after that, in the normal course of such matters, she was bombarded with flowers and threats. It reached the point where she was receiving 100-page letters. She fled to Germany with her husband. While they were in Germany,

[Mrs. Helen Liddell]

on the anniversary of Mrs. von Zugbach's first meeting with the harasser, Professor Zugbach's car was blown up and he was led to believe that the perpetrator was none other than the harasser. Professor von Zugbach has praised the police for their efforts, but he makes it clear that the law in Scotland appears inadequate to deal with cases of alleged stalking. He said:

"I used to agree that the breach of the peace laws were sufficient to deal with the problem, but now I realise this is not true".

A major problem with breach of the peace law relates to the nature of the sentences passed. In many cases, severe custodial sentences are required not only as a deterrence but in order to stop someone who will not take no for an answer. However, of the breach of the peace cases that have appeared before Scottish courts in recent years, only 6 per cent. led to custodial sentences. Only two cases appeared before the High Court—the most solemn court, where more significant sentences may be handed down. It is unfortunate that those who suffer harassment and stalking cannot take comfort from the knowledge that their perpetrator will receive a severe sentence.

Like many Scots, I am proud of the nature of the Scottish legal system. However, there is a danger of making breach of the peace a catch-all offence, which is too diverse and lacking in specifics. Similar arguments were advanced when hon. Members discussed the need to introduce vandalism legislation and, as a consequence, it was declared a separate offence.

The many people in Scotland who suffer from harassment are entitled to be reassured that there will be a separate criminal offence that carries clear and distinctive sentences to act as a deterrent and a punishment. That view was put many times by my hon. Friends long before I entered the House. It has been put more widely in the Scottish community, by the police, victims and lawyers involved in such cases.

I urge the Government to accept the amendment. Notwithstanding the pressures to get the Bill through as quickly as possible, the Opposition feel sufficiently strongly about this matter to put the amendment to the vote. I urge the Minister of State to take into account the wide range of opinion in Scotland. This unpleasant and heinous crime should be dealt with seriously so as to make the job of the police much easier, and a more clearly prescribed sentence should be available.

5 pm

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth and Kinross): I am a little concerned about the amendment, not because I disagree with the sentiments that have been expressed, but because I wonder whether it is absolutely necessary.

I want to make a few points about breach of the peace generally. At the moment, the definition of a breach of the peace is wide and flexible. People in Scotland can be charged for harassment and stalking under the category of a breach of the peace.

The hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) is right to say that there is a big problem with the general public's perception of the seriousness with which the matter is being dealt with. The difficulty is that a breach of the peace can, in theory, encompass serious as well as minor incidents. However, in practice, the approach has been to charge people who have committed minor incidents with a breach of the peace, so it is perceived as a minor offence. That is unfortunate, although it could be changed within the terms of existing law. It would require some discussion between those concerned, the Crown Office and the bench to avoid a breach of the peace being merely a bit of shouting and arguing on the street corner, which I suspect is what most people think of as a breach of the peace.

That matter was discussed in the Standing Committee considering the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill. A new clause was discussed and subsequently withdrawn. I would have been slightly happier with that new clause, because it was more detailed, related directly to Scotland and was not simply tacked on in this fashion.

As the Minister may remember, in that debate in Committee, I expressed my reservation about a breach of the peace. I realise that I may have to repeat some of what I said in Committee. When an individual is convicted, the judge has before him or her a schedule of previous convictions. The judge will consider those convictions before coming to a view on an appropriate disposal—I suspect that that happens in most cases. The difficulty with a breach of the peace is that it only ever shows as that: there is no specification on the schedule that would alert the judge to conduct that may have begun to develop. That is one of the biggest drawbacks.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I followed up that matter with the Lord Advocate. He has confirmed that it should be possible to include "harassment" in brackets after "breach of the peace" in the schedule of previous convictions. He is actively considering that possibility with a view to implementing it. I shall say more about that later. The hon. Lady's point has been acted on, and is being considered urgently.

Ms Cunningham: I am grateful to the Minister for that statement. That will help enormously. One of the difficulties with harassment is that it can be a number of apparently trivial incidents that together cause the problem. If that change were made to the existing practice and procedure, it would make a very big difference. It needs no change in the law to achieve that, but it will allow a judge to assess that crime more seriously. I look forward to hearing from the Minister when that change will take place. In view of his statement, I shall cut short my remarks.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): The motive behind the amendment is entirely proper. I do not consider it a wrecking amendment, and if that was said, it was a wholly misplaced comment. However, having spent a little time examining the history of the law of breach of the peace and the current law as presently stated in the most recent codification of the laws of Scotland, I have come reluctantly but firmly to the view that the amendment is misplaced.

When the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) spoke about breach of the peace, she failed to understand the flexibility of the law in Scotland on common law crime, and the extent to which it has developed since its original 18th or early 19th-century formulation. The basis for the use of the crime of a breach of the peace is to allow sufficient flexibility to deal with a range of situations that have as their consequence the

alarm or distress of a number of people or of an individual. I suspect that the problems that the hon. Lady outlined so eloquently are related not to the nature or state of the law, but to the willingness of the police or the procurator fiscal to take proceedings against individuals.

We should also bear in mind the fact that, if we create a such a crime, it will be established only by the use of corroborated evidence. The hon. Lady said that some people may have recourse to an interim interdict. There are good and understandable reasons for that. First, an interim interdict can be obtained before a judge literally at half an hour's notice.

Secondly, it can be obtained on the basis of ex parte statements—the legal representative appears on behalf of the pursuer. I am hopeful that we may at last educate some Conservative Members—the "pursuer" in Scotland is the term used for the person whom they call the "plaintiff". This is supposed to be the United Kingdom, but I am deeply disappointed that some of the Government's Back-Bench Members are not so immersed in the unity of the kingdom that they understand even the most basic terms used in Scottish law.

The representative of the pursuer, by stating a sufficiently forceful case, can obtain an interim interdict. Indeed, it can be obtained outwith the presence of the person against whom it is directed. Furthermore, any breach of an interdict—whether interim or permanent—is a contempt of court, and is capable of being dealt with by fine or imprisonment.

The Minister will recall that we changed the civil evidence rules in Scotland in 1990 when we removed the requirement for corroboration in civil cases. An interim interdict can be obtained on the basis of an ex parte statement at half an hour's notice and without the need for corroboration. It is not surprising that, faced with an urgent case, one adopts that route rather than attempting to invoke the use of the police and a prosecution, because that requires investigation, arrest, appearance in court, committal for trial and all the procedures that follow thereon. There is therefore something to be said for interim interdict.

In two cases—Montgomery *v.* McLeod 1977, with which I am sure the Minister is more than familiar, and Young *v.* Heatley 1959—the breadth of the application of the existing crime of breach of the peace is set out succinctly. The former states:

> "There is no limit to the kind of conduct which may give rise to a charge of breach of the peace. All that is required is that there must be some conduct such as to excite the reasonable apprehension to which we have drawn attention, or such as to create disturbance and alarm to the lieges in fact".

The language is somewhat Victorian; a liege is simply a citizen.

According to the latter case:

> "Breach of the peace, however, is an offence the limits of which have never been sharply defined. It is so largely in each case a question of circumstances and of degree".

In the course of my researches, I encountered a further case, which, unhappily, is not reported. I refer to Mackie *v.* McLeod 1961, with which the Minister may also be familiar. The circumstances are interesting. The accused person became infatuated with a young woman whom he hardly knew, and formed the habit of waiting outside her place of employment, looking at her and then following her and her fiancé for some part of their time together. He was convicted of breach of the peace. An appeal was taken, on the grounds that the facts disclosed in the evidence did not justify the conviction, but the conviction was upheld by the High Court. That may not be the most extreme instance of stalking, but it seems to me to contain substantially the elements of stalking, and I consider it a clear indication that the law has been seen to be adequate to deal with the problem.

As for bail and the particular case to which the hon. Member for Monklands, East referred, it would have been open to the judge in granting bail—I am surprised that this did not happen—to make it a condition of bail that the person granted it did not go back to live next door to the alleged victim. If that condition had been applied and had then been breached, the individual could have been brought back to court, bail could have been revoked and he could have been kept on remand in prison until such time as it was appropriate to deal with his case.

What is significant is not the state of the law but the state of willingness of those responsible for the administration of the law—the police in the first instance, and the procurator fiscal service in the second. That lies at the heart of some of the difficulties outlined by the hon. Lady.

I fear that, if the amendment were passed, it might achieve the opposite of what is intended. At present, if charges are brought under the crime of breach of the peace, there is a degree of flexibility and discretion. Indeed, some argue that the degree of discretion is too great, but that is not an argument that we are considering today. If the crime of harassment is created in Scotland, there may well be cases in which the borderline is drawn in such a way that a person who would otherwise be convicted of breach of the peace will be acquitted of harassment.

Although the hon. Lady's motive is not to be challenged in any way, and despite her obvious concern and the time and trouble that she took in preparing her speech, she has not appreciated the precise nature of the crime of breach of the peace in Scottish law. If the amendment were accepted, it might actually make the conviction of those guilty of harassment more difficult than it is in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) made an excellent speech. It is a few years since I acted as his junior counsel in a murder case, which he conducted admirably. I agree with everything that he said. He was right to say that the motive of the hon. Member for Monklands, East (Mrs. Liddell) is good. I have great sympathy with her purpose, but I do not think that amendment No. 27 is the best means of achieving it.

The amendment is unnecessary. In Scotland, any conduct that causes or is likely to cause alarm, annoyance or upset will always be criminal, as the common law offence of breach of the peace. Watching someone, following that person, sending unwanted letters or gifts or attempting to contact the person in any way can give rise to a charge of breach of the peace if the target of such conduct is alarmed, annoyed or upset by it. No statutory offence of harassment is needed.

Breach of the peace is broad and flexible as an offence. Indeed, it is certainly as wide as the lower-level harassment offence that the hon. Lady now seeks to

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introduce in Scotland. As a common law offence, it incurs a maximum penalty of life imprisonment following a conviction or indictment in the High Court. The creation of statutory offences with statutory minimum penalties will not enable stalking to be dealt with either more effectively or more severely than it is already dealt with in Scotland. No changes are required to Scottish criminal law in that regard.

5.15 pm

Like the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East, I would be concerned about the effect of the amendment on the structure of the criminal law in Scotland. The lower-level offence and the higher-level offence of putting people in fear of violence are part of a package for England and Wales. Importing the lower-level offence to Scotland would result in prosecutions for less serious conduct being brought under the statutory offence, but where more serious conduct was involved, prosecution would have to be brought under the common law. The lower-level offence would be triable summarily, and would involve a maximum penalty of six months' imprisonment.

In the debate on the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill, the Opposition agreed that the sentencing powers of the sheriff summary court should be increased to allow six months' imprisonment. The lower-level offence would fall squarely within the sheriffs' summary jurisdiction. Its introduction would therefore not result in harassments being taken more seriously, or in the imposition of tougher sentences.

The Bill does not make any changes in Scottish criminal law, because there is no need to do so. The existing law works. In Scotland, any conduct that causes alarm can be dealt with as a breach of the peace. Sentences are at the discretion of the court, but the maximum available penalties for breach of the peace are much greater than those proposed for a statutory offence. Nothing would be gained by creating such an offence.

Stalking is rightly taken very seriously. A circular was issued by the Crown Office to all procurators fiscal to re-emphasise the Lord Advocate's concern that cases of alleged stalking should be accorded priority. It said that careful consideration should be given to the court venue, so that cases are brought on indictment if appropriate, and that all offending behaviour should be libelled, not just the most recent incident.

Breach of the peace is a wide-ranging offence, and that has great advantages. It deals with the most minor offences, which would not warrant custodial sentences, but would also tackle the most serious examples of alarming conduct. Custodial sentences are imposed. In a three-year period between 1992 and 1994, 3,063 people received such sentences for breach of the peace. That shows that it is certainly not a trivial offence for which everyone gets just a slap on the wrist.

The hon. Lady raised the Durie case. I cannot agree with her suggestion that the existence of a statutory offence would have resulted in that case being treated more seriously. Summary proceedings were taken, which meant that the sheriff could impose up to three months' imprisonment. Once the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill is enacted, that will increase to six months—the same maximum penalty as for the lower-level harassment offence. Since the Durie case, new powers have come into existence for the Lord Advocate to appeal against sentences that are too lenient.

The hon. Member for Perth and Kinross (Ms Cunningham) raised an important point in the Committee stage of the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill about persons who had a history of harassment that was not shown adequately in a schedule of previous convictions. I told her that I would follow that up with the Lord Advocate. It should be possible to record such a conviction as a breach of the peace, with "harassment" added in brackets. I understand that there are precedents for that: "theft" can have "shoplifting" added in brackets after it, so that, if someone is continually involved in shoplifting, that will be picked up. It should be possible to note that harassment has been involved in breach of the peace offences so that appropriate disposals will be made in the event of a long history of offending.

I applaud the aim of the hon. Member for Monklands, East but in all respects the offence of breach of the peace is adequate to deal with stalking and harassment, and I must resist her amendment.

Mrs. Liddell: I am sorry that the Minister does not see fit to accept the amendment. One of the great advantages of being a Member of the House is that we are enabled as taxpayers to get the benefit of distinguished legal advice free of charge. I greatly appreciate the remarks by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell).

The Minister did not refer to the fact that there is a blurring between the use of civil and criminal remedies in the existing legislation. Without a clearly defined criminal offence, women and others who suffer from harassment will have to have recourse to the civil remedy. The cost of doing that and the crisis in civil legal aid could greatly inhibit opportunities to achieve redress. While I do not wish unnecessarily to delay the Committee, I should like the amendment to be put to the vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 121, Noes 210.

Division No. 33] **[5.20 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Austin–Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blair, Tony
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, D N
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try SE)*
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C)*
Dewar, Donald
Dobson, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Ms Angela
Ennis, Jeffrey
Etherington, Bill
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Derek

Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Ms Mildred
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hardy, Peter
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd–on–A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hutton, John
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jenkins, Brian D *(SE Staffs)*
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Mrs Jane *(Broadgreen)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretf'd)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Michael, Alun
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Mrs B *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Quin, Ms Joyce
Raynsford, Nick
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Sheldon, Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Ms R *(Dunfermline W)*
Strang, Dr Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Watson, Mike
Williams, Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cummings and
Mr. Kevin Hughes.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Alton, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Linc'n)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Paul
Chapman, Sir Sydney
Chidgey, David
Coe, Sebastian
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Quentin *(Stamf'd)*
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Douglas–Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble V)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel–Jones, Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gummer, John
Hague, William
Hamilton, Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Sir Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Michael
Higgins, Sir Terence
Hill, Sir James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Douglas *(Grantham)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Michael
Howell, David *(Guildf'd)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensb'ne)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(Colchester N)*
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Herts)*
Kellett–Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Kynoch, George
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox–Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Sir Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Molyneaux, Sir James
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Miss Emma *(W Devon)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pattie, Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, David
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, John
Rendel, David
Richards, Rod
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Sir Wyn
Rowe, Andrew
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Sir Colin *(Heref'd)*
Sims, Sir Roger
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spicer, Sir Michael *(S Worcs)*
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Sir John
Steel, Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Streeter, Gary
Sweeney, Walter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Miss Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesf'ld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Morris. As it now appears that British personnel are involved in the siege in Lima, and following what Madam

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

Speaker said about my point of order earlier today, may I ask yet again whether there has been any hint from the Foreign Office that it will make a statement?

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Morris): Certainly the occupant of the Chair has not been informed of any intention to make a statement now.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Timothy Kirkhope): I beg to move amendment No. 43, in page 7, line 12, after 'Act' insert

'(except section *(Corresponding provision for Northern Ireland)*)'.

The Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government new clause 2—*Corresponding provision for Northern Ireland.*

Mr. Kirkhope: The consultation period on the paper "Stalking in Northern Ireland" ended on 2 December. I am sure that hon. Members will be pleased to know that, as all responses broadly supported the introduction of legislation, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland asked my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to extend the Bill to Northern Ireland.

There are differences between the current criminal and civil legislation for England and Wales and for Northern Ireland, and the new clause therefore permits the Bill's replication in Northern Ireland by negative resolution. If legislation were to be by affirmative resolution, there would for some time be a gap in the legislation between the jurisdictions, for which, given the vulnerability of the victims that the Bill is designed to protect, we might be criticised. New clause 2 puts into effect the request by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that the Bill be replicated for Northern Ireland under the negative resolution procedure.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the Minister's words in introducing the amendment. We have had the time since the Loyal Address to refer to the fact that we believe that the Bill should be extended to Northern Ireland. I understand some of the difficulties in legislating for other parts of the kingdom, which were obvious in the debate on amendment No. 27, and I also understand that there are people in Northern Ireland who keep telling us that the differences in legislation make it difficult to do so, but they do not make it impossible. I appreciate that steps have been taken to fill that gap so that we might go forward fairly quickly together.

Mr. Kirkhope: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. I am sure that he was involved in the consultation on "Stalking in Northern Ireland" and that he and his colleagues will be pleased. We are, of course, delighted to do what we can to make the Bill applicable there.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 13, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 14 and 15 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New clause 2

CORRESPONDING PROVISION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

'. An Order in Council made under paragraph 1(1)(b) of Schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 1974 which contains a statement that it is made only for purposes corresponding to those of sections 1 to 7 and 12 of this Act—

(a) shall not be subject to sub-paragraphs (4) and (5) of paragraph 1 of that Schedule (affirmative resolution of both Houses of Parliament), but

(b) shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament'.— *[Mr. Maclean.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 1

POWERS OF COURT TO PROTECT VICTIMS DURING TRIALS

'. In any proceedings under this Act, where it appears to the court that distress is being caused to any person who may have been the victim of any act of harassment to which this Act applies by reason of the decision of the person accused of that act of harassment to represent himself in those proceedings, it may require the person accused of the act of harassment to be legally represented.'.— *[Ms Janet Anderson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms Janet Anderson: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause's purpose is to highlight a problem about which the Minister and I have corresponded. It concerns the arrangements for defendants to cross-examine witnesses in person.

Recently, two cases aroused particular public concern. The first involved Julia Mason, who was cross-examined for six days by the man who was eventually found guilty of raping her.

The second case was that of Margaret Bent, to whom I have already referred. Margaret was cross-examined by her alleged stalker, Dennis Chambers. At the time of the case, the National Association of Victim Support Schemes called for the victims of domestic or sexual violence or similar cases to have the right not to be examined by the accused. In view of what happened to Margaret Bent, I should be grateful if the Minister would give us a progress report on the deliberations in which I know that his Department is engaged.

Mr. Maclean: The new clause would give the court discretion in any proceedings under the Act to require a person accused of an act of harassment to be legally represented if it appears to the court that distress is caused to the victim of that harassment by reason of the accused representing himself.

The Government recognise that serious concerns have arisen from the recent cases in which victims of rape and stalking offences have been caused enormous distress by being cross-examined by defendants who are not legally represented and who appear to take the opportunity during the cross-examination to make the victims relive some of the horrendous experiences they have endured. We find that unacceptable. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced in a speech in October that he was determined to ensure that it was prevented. A review of the law covering this matter is under way.

Depriving a defendant of the right to represent himself if he chooses to do so is a serious matter, and there are some complex issues to consider carefully, including the range of offences to which such measures might apply. Confining it to proceedings relating to harassment alone, which is what the new clause would do, would not meet the concerns of one of the rape victims about whom we heard earlier and would not cover the case that gave rise to the most concern. There are also other serious offences to which this provision would sensibly apply.

Mr. Bennett: Can the Minister tell us the timetable for the review?

Mr. Maclean: No, I cannot. The review is being conducted as speedily as possible. I have not set an artificial time scale, but we want the answers as soon as possible. It is not an easy thing to do. The mischief—I use that word in its technical legal sense—or the evil, which is a more colloquial word, caused by the comments and behaviour of those representing themselves is a complex thing to try to prevent. The damage that we want to prevent is simple to describe, as is the concept, but the practical issues are tricky.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): I can well understand that depriving a defendant of the opportunity to be represented at all would be a very serious matter. However, many people within and outside the House of Commons would think that to tell a defendant that he must be represented by a lawyer would not be such a serious deprivation and would not outweigh the right of the complainant not to be subjected to the indignity that the two unfortunate women to whom the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) referred had to endure.

Mr. Maclean: I have heard my hon. Friend's point of view; he is experienced in these matters. If we propose taking away the right of defendants to represent themselves, we have to be careful how we do it, in what cases we do it and where we draw the line. It could be a slippery slope towards removing the right of defendants to represent themselves in quite the wrong cases.

When we reach our preliminary conclusions, we will discuss them with the Law Society and the Bar Council, but we are not at that stage yet. We wish to make progress as quickly as possible. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and I and all right-thinking people were appalled at the way in which one defendant in particular behaved in the rape cross-examination. We would all like to stamp out such mischief, overnight if possible, but as I have said, this is a complex area of law.

We fully understand the concerns that lie behind the new clause. I do not believe that the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Ms Anderson) intends to insist that this should be built into the Bill for harassment only. When we find a solution to the problem, we want it to apply to a sensible and coherent range of measures. There may be a range of offences where we would want to make some changes, if we conclude that change is possible and can be done sensibly.

I hope that the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen will withdraw the motion and accept my assurance that the Government wish to move as speedily as possible. We want to reach a sensible conclusion, which, we hope, will be acceptable to most of those in the profession and the judiciary, which will not infringe anyone's rights or take away justice and which victims will find bearable.

5.45 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The Minister's account of these matters is well judged and appropriate. If one is to innovate on the constitutional right of any individual to defend himself or herself, one must be certain that it is entirely justified. I have not had the benefit of reading the transcripts of the two trials to which reference was made. However, in my experience, which is perhaps becoming increasingly outdated and is confined to Scotland, any effort at repetitious or offensive cross-examination from an individual defending himself or herself was almost always dealt with extremely severely by the judge. The point at which it becomes offensive is a fine judgment to make, but, for most people, the offensive nature of the two cases to which we have referred must have been evident to all who were participating. I am a little surprised that the judges did not feel able to take what one might regard as a firmer hand.

Mr. Maclean: It may help the hon. and learned Gentleman if I tell him that reading the transcript would not give a full account of the offensiveness. In one case, the defendant wore identical clothes to those he wore during the rape and deported himself in a similar way. The transcript does not give the full picture of the evil that he was committing in the court.

Mr. Campbell: There is no substitute for being present in the case. One often reads reports of cases in which one has been involved which seem to bear little resemblance to reality. I accept that there is a problem, and my only question is why a firmer hand was not taken. Perhaps the Lord Chancellor should issue some clearer directives on what is permissible.

Mr. Stephen *rose—*

Mr. Campbell: I must make progress, because I know that the Committee is of that mind.

There are some instances in which the accused commences the case being represented but, as the case progresses, it becomes impossible for his or her legal representatives to continue, either because the nature of the instructions changes dramatically and puts the professional position of the legal representative in jeopardy or because the instructions change so as to suggest an approach that does not amount to a defence in law. If legal representatives have withdrawn, it might be difficult to force the appointment of other legal representatives, who might find themselves faced with the same problem.

There might be almost a pantomime: the case would be adjourned so that fresh counsel could be instructed and that fresh counsel would turn up the following morning saying, "We have had a consultation with the accused, but, unfortunately, we are unable to represent him." Such circumstances could bedevil proceedings in a way that would not add to the dignity of the court.

[Mr. Campbell]

There are complicated issues involved in not just the constitutional principle but the practicality of making a rule such as that proposed in the new clause. I hope that the motion is not pressed to a Division, because I do not believe that, in the present state of our knowledge and the consultation, we would be able to reach an informed decision.

Mr. Stephen: The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell) mentioned cases in which judges deal quickly and decisively with defendants who represent themselves and break the rules of procedure. Like him, I have some experience in the courts, and I fear that, in many such cases, judges are reluctant to interfere with the conduct of a defence by a defendant in person lest that be used as a ground of appeal leading to a subsequent hearing in the Court of Appeal.

On the hon. and learned Gentleman's other point—if the defendant were to run a defence that is not a defence in law—there is no more reason for allowing him to run that defence in person than if he were represented by a lawyer.

Ms Janet Anderson: This is obviously a very difficult issue, and we have no intention of pressing the motion to a Division—although I am grateful for having had the opportunity to air the subject. I am also grateful to the Minister for his concern about the problem. We are thankful that his Department is conducting its review, and we look forward to a speedy response. We hope that it will be possible to do something to end the type of problem experienced by those women.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Bill, as amended, to be reported.

Order for Third Reading read.

5.51 pm

Mr. Maclean: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said in yesterday's debate on Second Reading that the Bill had one simple aim: to protect the victims of harassment. The Bill aims to give that protection, not by defining activities that are known as stalking—as we believe that such a definition will inevitably omit some activities that are distressing, or worse, to victims—but by focusing on the harm inflicted on the victim. That harm is harassment. The benefits of proceeding in such a manner are that all forms of harassment—whether stalking, racial abuse, neighbour or work disputes—are covered.

As I listened to the speech of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North–East (Mr. Campbell), I was tempted to say that I wish that I had the benefit in England of Scotland's breach of the peace provisions, about which I learned many years ago.

The Bill adopts a twin-track approach by using the civil and criminal law, both of which have a part to play in providing effective remedies to combat harassment. The new concept of a restraining order that will be available to criminal courts on conviction is a major step forward and has been welcomed by those campaigning on the issue.

The Opposition agreed to co-operate with the Government to pass the Bill without delay. We have made some good progress today, and I am delighted with the support and assistance that we have received today. It is a matter of regret that we got a bit bogged down yesterday and that the Bill was amended in a manner that is unacceptable to the Government and absolutely unworkable in practice. We will have to take a little time in another place to put the Bill back on the straight and narrow.

Sentencing is a matter for the criminal courts, and conditions of treatment attached to sentences are a matter for them. We believe that they have ample powers to order treatment, which might be probation, intensive therapy or counselling. I believe that counselling is of value only when it is entered into voluntarily and willingly. People seek counselling, but they cannot be forced into it. Moreover, civil courts do not sentence people at all but are a forum for the resolution of disputes. However, that issue can be addressed in another place.

Mr. George Howarth: The Minister said that counselling is effective only if it is undertaken on a voluntary basis. He should examine some of the programmes for prisoners run by the Prison Service. Prisoners are required to attend those programmes, which often achieve very good results among those who have attended on a non-voluntary basis.

Mr. Maclean: We do not want to get into that debate now; I merely say that there is a world of difference between the situation that the hon. Gentleman describes and prisoners whose entitlement to parole or early release depends on their participating in the prison regime and other activities, such as drying out from drug dependency. Technically, attending such a programme in prison may be voluntary, but prisoners believe that, if they do not attend, they will not be granted parole. There is a sanction in prison that will not be replicated in the outside world, particularly through civil courts. However, let us not discuss that issue on Third Reading.

We will continue to place the safety and protection of the British people at the top of our agenda for action. The Bill is one of a number of measures that the Government have recently introduced in the House or in another place that, when enacted, will make the United Kingdom a safer and a better place in which to live. As I said earlier, I have no wish to delay the Bill further. The Government have set out clearly our objections to the Opposition's amendment, and we have stated our intention to put the Bill right in the other place. Victims of stalking and of other forms of harassment should not have their hopes of protection put at risk by any further delay or unnecessary amendments to the Bill.

I believe that the Bill will provide victims of harassment with the protection that they need. The Bill's provisions strike the right balance between the need to give reassurance and protection to victims and the need not to constrain legitimate activity, whether it is the action of journalists, private investigators, debt collectors or, of course, politicians.

With the caveat that I have mentioned, I commend this excellent Bill to the House.

5.55 pm

Ms Janet Anderson: The Opposition had always intended to be fully co-operative on the Bill, because, like the Minister and Conservative Members, we recognise the need to bring relief to the victims of stalking as quickly as possible. The intention of our amendments, therefore—despite what some hon. Members may think—was not to obstruct. I should tell the Minister that, had we intended to be obstructive, we would have pushed our definition to a Division. We chose not to do so, because we wanted to facilitate the Bill's passage. The Suzy Lamplugh Trust agreed that our amendments were intended to improve the Bill, and that was their intention.

As the Minister has mentioned yesterday's events, I should mention the reason for what we did. Criminal courts already have powers—which have been confirmed and backed by the Government—to provide counselling to confront offenders' criminal behaviour. However, as the Bill is drafted, that power would arise only when an injunction was breached—when a defendant resumed his stalking—and would be dealt with only by applying the much higher burden of proof of beyond reasonable doubt. As we know, many stalkers are obsessive, and firm action to confront their offending behaviour may have to be taken as quickly as possible. The threat of imprisonment is also necessary if victims are to be properly protected.

That is why, last night, the Opposition moved amendment No. 13, to provide county courts with power to order counselling when making an anti-stalking injunction. In moving the amendment, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) said:

"We mean not some pleasant chat over a cup of tea . . . but the sort of counselling that forces offenders to face up to their offending behaviour".—[*Official Report*, 17 December 1996; Vol. 287, c. 838.]

The Minister claimed in his speech that our amendments were unworkable. I refer him to the leader page of tonight's *Evening Standard*, which rightly states:

"Tony Blair, promised to cooperate with the Home Secretary in getting"

the Bill

"through the House without delay",

and that the Home Secretary

"is now accusing Labour of going back on its word by putting up amendments to the Bill which would clarify what it means by harassment."

The *Evening Standard* goes on to say that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's Labour counterpart

"is right to insist on scrutiny. Mr. Howard's Bill, like so much of the legislation which has emerged from the Home Office during his tenure, shows signs of clumsy and over-hasty drafting."

I hope that the Minister will accept that we tabled our amendments with the best of intentions, and we hope that Ministers will give them—particularly the amendment that the House passed last night—serious consideration.

Having said that, we wish the Bill well and a speedy passage through the other place. I am sure that the thousands of victims of stalking, and those in other categories whom the Minister claims the measures will help—such as those in neighbour or racial disputes—will be greatly relieved when it reaches the statute book.

5.59 pm

Mr. Bennett: I, too, hope that the Bill turns out to be a good one, but I have to put down certain markers. I fear that, with the Government not prepared to commit any new resources, the legislation may not be enforced as effectively as the House would like. It is not reasonable to expect the police to be able to give the necessary time and attention to harassment cases in particular without there being resourcing implications. We should be worried about passing legislation without providing the necessary resources.

We should also ask whether the House did a proper job of scrutiny. I fear that we shall find that the Bill does not protect all those whom we want to protect. We may well find that one or two people whom we did not intend to be caught by the legislation will be. The lessons for the House must be that, although all-party co-operation is a good idea, it should not shorten proper scrutiny. I do not think that the Floor of the House is the proper place for detailed scrutiny. Even though we were trying to get the measure through House quickly, it would have been far better to send the Bill to a Standing Committee, even if the Committee had had to sit for long hours to carry out the scrutiny effectively. I hope that the legislation works, but, when the House looks back on this day and a half, I do not think that we will believe that we carried out our scrutiny role effectively.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third Time, and passed.

National Heritage Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

6.1 pm

The Minister of State, Department of National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill extends the powers of the trustees of the national heritage memorial fund on the projects that they can fund and the recipients eligible for funding.

As the House will know, the NHMF trustees distribute the heritage share of the national lottery proceeds. Our aim is to build on the existing success of the lottery as a source of funding for the national heritage. We are keen that everyone should be able to appreciate and benefit from that heritage. We want lottery money to be used to enhance opportunities for people—especially the young—to have ready access to our heritage, to learn about it and to enjoy it. We also want to ensure that any worthwhile heritage project can be considered for lottery funding, with no artificial barriers.

Under the existing legislation, which predates the advent of the lottery, the NHMF trustees can fund only those projects that involve the acquisition, maintenance or preservation of tangible heritage assets. Of course, that gives the NHMF plenty of scope to support worthwhile projects, and it is taking full advantage of those opportunities.

However, because of the current terms of the legislation, the NHMF's role as a lottery distributor is more restricted than the Government and the trustees wish. The NHMF cannot, for instance, offer funds for projects that promote access to our heritage or enhance understanding and enjoyment of it. It cannot assist in the development of heritage skills, and is limited in its ability to support nature conservation work.

We want to lift those constraints. We want the NHMF to back heritage projects comparable with those that other lottery distributors are supporting in their sectors.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Minister be specific about the inhibitions on undertaking conservation work? My understanding is that the national heritage memorial fund has been very good about supporting New Hailes, near Edinburgh, which is really a conservation project.

Mr. Sproat: Perhaps I could come back to the hon. Gentleman on that project. The fund exists mainly to acquire, preserve and maintain tangible objects. Conservation can be part of preservation, therefore falling within the fund's current remit, but the NHMF trustees have been uneasy about any project that strays too far from the acquisition, preservation and maintenance of tangible objects. However, I shall look into the New Hailes example and see exactly how it was dealt with.

The choice of projects is, of course, a matter for the NHMF trustees. However, the trustees and the Government are clear that our heritage offers ample scope for the NHMF to undertake a wider role than is at present legally possible.

Projects that the trustees might want to consider funding could include the assignment of a professional educationist to a heritage site to train staff and produce material for use by school parties, the use of information technology to develop a virtual reality programme showing how a cathedral developed over time, or a training scheme for a heritage-related skill—be it stained glass conservation or hedge laying.

We also want the NHMF to be able to support projects that enhance understanding of our national history or landscape, independently of its tangible remains.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): Together with other members of the Environment Select Committee, I visited the natural history museum this morning. The nation can be justly proud of the enormous collection held there—the largest in the world—of specimens from the natural world, and of the high-quality scientific research that goes on there. We were shown the efforts made by the museum to put its specimens on computer disk, and to make its collection available to all the scientists in the world through the Internet. I am sure that the museum will welcome my hon. Friend's comments about the availability of money for information technology projects.

Mr. Sproat: I am glad that my hon. Friend visited the natural history museum, which is one of the finest natural history museums in the world, if not the finest. Anyone who has not discovered how many angles a beetle can be seen from with information technology would not believe it. The natural history museum is far advanced in such matters. I am sure that other museums will take up similar technology in a major way.

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Bill will enable the Victoria County History of England, which is a national project, to apply for lottery funding?

Mr. Sproat: I shall come to that in just a second. You yourself, Mr. Deputy Speaker, played an important role in that project. I shall deal with it in a few sentences. I ask my right hon. Friend to contain himself.

We have identified three types of project that fulfil the purpose that I mentioned. The first is an exhibition on a particular aspect of our history. Examples might be a museum exhibition on the life and work of an important figure in history or on the ecology of a particular region. The second is the creation of an archive—for instance, an oral record of the distinctive experiences of particular localities or groups. The third—this was identified during the Bill's passage through another place—is a major work of reference such as the Victoria County History.

The answer to my right hon. Friend is yes. I want to pay particular tribute to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if that is not a creepy thing to do, because your great work and valuable advice enabled us to include the project in the Bill. All those who value the county histories pay great credit to your work.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Perhaps I should declare an interest, because my hon. Friend probably does not know that, together with Denis Mahon and others, I drafted the National Heritage Act 1980, which led to this Bill. Having read the Bill, I congratulate the Minister on it. We are now moving the national heritage memorial fund towards history and school projects, to enable people

to relate the written word to our history and monuments. The Bill is tremendous, and the Minister deserves every conceivable congratulation on it.

Mr. Sproat: This is a big evening for congratulations. I thank my hon. Friend for his. It is a tribute to his original work on the 1980 Act that the new Bill is so short. He deserves credit for that.

The first of the Bill's two main elements is the opening up of the NHMF's statutory terms of reference to embrace a much wider range of worthwhile heritage projects. The second element concerns who is eligible for assistance from the NHMF. Existing legislation permits the NHMF to offer financial assistance only to public and charitable bodies that have been established for a specific heritage purpose.

That remit, of course, takes in much that is at the very heart of our heritage, but it rules out a great many potentially worthwhile projects. In built heritage alone, more than two thirds of historic buildings are privately owned. As the law stands, those buildings are outside the NHMF's terms of reference and therefore cannot be considered for lottery funding.

When the National Heritage Committee examined the national lottery earlier this year, the NHMF, English Heritage and other bodies all argued that limiting eligibility for lottery funding in such a way works against the best interests of heritage, and that the restrictions on eligibility should therefore be removed. The Select Committee agreed with that view, and so do the Government. We believe that ownership of property should not determine whether a project is eligible for lottery support. What matters is whether the project has heritage merit and will be for the public good.

There have been suggestions that the purpose of the proposal is simply to enable lottery money to reach the owners of historic country houses, but privately owned heritage includes buildings of almost every kind. There is considerable scope for the lottery to support heritage projects, such as historic townscape schemes as an element of urban regeneration, or conservation projects in the countryside. A number of such projects have already received lottery awards, but the NHMF has often been unable to help because much of the property concerned is privately owned.

Nor, of course, is the proposal confined to historic buildings. The new approach to eligibility will also apply, for example, to museums, land and artefacts owned by private individuals. There is of course nothing new about making public funds available for the benefit of privately owned heritage property. For many years, English Heritage and other bodies have been running grant schemes for historic buildings of outstanding quality, irrespective of ownership. Grants are subject, quite properly, to stringent conditions on matters such as public access, and there is provision for the means testing of applicants and for clawback of funds if necessary. The NHMF trustees accept that, if lottery grants are to be given to private owners of heritage property, such rigorous safeguards will be required.

There has also been concern that the Government's aim in extending the NHMF's funding remit is to enable lottery money to replace core funding for heritage, thus going back on our undertaking that lottery money would be additional to existing expenditure programmes. The immediate response to such concern is to point to the extremely favourable public expenditure settlement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has achieved for heritage bodies in the next financial year.

Museums and galleries, for instance, have been granted an additional £3 million over previous plans. An additional £1.8 million will be available to English Heritage. Those figures testify to the Government's determination to protect core funding in priority areas of heritage.

Mr. Dalyell: The Minister will know of the British museum's concern about the terrible dilemma of either paying off staff or being faced with charging for entrance, which for very good reasons they are exceedingly reluctant to undertake. Can he really be so complacent about the position?

Mr. Sproat: Not a tremor of complacency had entered my voice on the matter. The devastating report on the finances, organisation, management and general efficiency of the British museum came not from the Government but from an independent report that was commissioned by the trustees. It was in that report that the suggestion was made that imposing entry charges was one way in which to make up the shortfall that arose from—not to put it too disagreeably—the not wholly adequate running of the finances and organisation of the British museum in past years. The Government did not say that. The Government do not encourage or discourage charging.

Some museums, such as the British museum, do not charge, but others, such as the natural history museum, which my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) visited today, the science museum, the imperial war museum and the maritime museum not only charge but are extremely glad that they have done so.

If the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) talked to Sir Neil Cossons, Neil Chalmers or Robert Crawford, or went to the maritime museum, he would find that they very much wish to keep a charging policy. That is up to them, just as it is up to the British museum's trustees to decide whether they want to charge. They have not looked after the finances as well as they might have liked, and if they can find another way in which to put finances back on a sound basis without going in for charging, that is fine; so be it. No pressure will come from the Government.

It would be interesting to know whether, if they were ever in power, the Opposition intend to abolish such charges, and if so, where they would get the money to make up for the charges that currently help the science museum, the natural history museum, the maritime museum, the imperial war museum, and so on.

The Government stand by our undertaking that lottery money will not replace existing funding. That of course does not mean that, in areas where lottery funding is available, expenditure programmes are immune from the constraints applying to public spending generally. Nor does it prevent lottery money from complementing other funding. In the heritage sector, it is entirely right that projects that are beyond the scope of English Heritage's grant programmes, generous as that is—in terms of either eligibility or affordability—should be able to be considered for lottery funding.

[Mr. Sproat]

What is important is that there should be agreed strategies on the role of the lottery in relation to other heritage programmes, so that the available funds can be applied where they are needed. With that in mind, the NHMF is having discussions with English Heritage and other bodies on future funding priorities in the light of the new powers conferred by the Bill.

I turn to the Bill's specific provisions. Clause 1 redefines the funding powers of the NHMF trustees, as set out in section 3 of the National Heritage Act 1980, which my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) helped to draft. There are three main changes. First, the NHMF's remit is extended beyond simply the acquisition, maintenance or preservation of land, buildings or objects of importance to national heritage. Under the Bill, the NHMF will also be able to support projects that encourage study, understanding and enjoyment of heritage, promote access to heritage, or develop skills relating to heritage.

Secondly, there is a new power for the NHMF to fund specified types of project which relate to important aspects of the United Kingdom's history, natural history or landscape, and which the trustees consider are of public benefit. That power encompasses exhibitions, archives and comprehensive works of reference, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) referred.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): All over the country in the 1920s, war memorials were erected by public subscription. Some of them belong to local authorities, and many are onerous burdens. Will the Bill enable those war memorials to be looked after properly, providing, of course, that the correct procedures are followed?

Mr. Sproat: I hope so. My hon. Friend raises a very important point, which we shall perhaps be able to go into in rather more depth in Committee when we consider particular examples.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow mentioned New Hailes. The NHMF has been able to support the acquisition of New Hailes by the National Trust for Scotland, because the National Trust is a public body. If the present owner of New Hailes had sought help from the NHMF for repairs to the building—the hon. Gentleman mentioned conservation, which might just fall under the remit of repairs, I suppose—she would not have been able to receive funding. It is in part to allow such added discretion for the trustees that we have introduced the Bill. It would have been possible to help New Hailes under the Bill even had it not been for the acquisition by the National Trust for Scotland.

Secondly, there is a new power for the NHMF to fund specified types of project that relate to an important aspect of the United Kingdom's history, and so on, including the comprehensive works of reference that I have already mentioned.

Thirdly, the current list of recipients eligible for NHMF funding will disappear. Instead, the NHMF will be able to support any project that the trustees consider is of importance to the national heritage and of public benefit.

Clause 2 repeals existing provisions that require the NHMF to obtain departmental and Treasury approval for the payment of allowances to trustees and for certain staffing matters. We propose to table one small amendment to clause 2, which will concern the remuneration for NHMF trustees.

It is arguable that the work involved in assessing lottery applications is approaching the point at which it becomes unreasonable to ask trustees to give their time unpaid. We do not intend to make any immediate decisions about that. However, the NHMF is virtually alone among lottery distributors in that its trustees are precluded by statute from receiving substantive remuneration. We want to take the opportunity provided by the Bill to remove the current statutory bar. The current chairman has made it clear that he would not wish to make use of the change to receive remuneration himself.

I am confident that the Bill will be welcomed by all hon. Members with an interest in our country's incomparable heritage. It will effectively bring the whole of the heritage within reach of lottery funding, it will ensure that resources are deployed where they are most needed, and it will open the door to a range of exciting new projects—projects not only to preserve the heritage but also to help deepen our understanding of it and enhance our enjoyment of it.

I commend the Bill to the House.

6.20 pm

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): We welcome the Bill, which has the Opposition's general support. Lord Donoughue, on behalf of the Opposition, made clear our support in the excellent debate in the other place. We accept the case that the Minister has made for augmenting and widening the powers of the national heritage memorial fund and the heritage lottery fund trustees so as to give greater flexibility in the operation of the two funds.

At present, those funds are circumscribed by the fact that they are charged only with acquisition, maintenance and preservation, so a lot of imaginative opportunities are being missed. The hon. Member for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson) made a good point about memorials, which are much loved in communities throughout the country, and constitute an extraordinary record of our history and of the sacrifices that communities have made on behalf of this country. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there is an organisation that cares for memorials, but it is hugely underfunded, and relies purely on charitable money.

It is precisely such projects that will now be eligible because of the wider powers, and we look forward to exploring that aspect of the Bill in committee. Such opportunities are being missed at present, and the Bill properly opens the possibilities for their inclusion. That is one of the reasons why we welcome it.

We are enthusiastic about some of the specific powers, especially those concerning wider access. As we understand it, matters such as the cost of transport for school groups to sites, and the pricing policy of some heritage sites, would become eligible for assistance as a result of the Bill. The educational work of schools, youth initiatives and training in heritage-related skills, perhaps by means of bursaries, will be included So will the important issue of information technology, to which the Minister alluded briefly, and which we shall explore

in Committee. That will arise in connection with access to the great archives of this country and other archive material, which all have enormous potential both for academics and in schools.

We welcome all those developments, especially the widening of the definition to include conservation of our natural heritage. At present conservation of our habitats, flora and fauna receives only about 9 per cent. of national heritage memorial funding; yet our hedgerows, heaths and sedges, and the extraordinary diversity and beauty of the British landscape in general, tell us a great deal about how our forefathers lived, and how we have created what is often a man-made landscape. As a society, we have not always been as careful as we should have been about that, or given the funding to preserve those great natural and man-made landscapes, so we welcome the fact that such projects will become eligible for funding.

We should like an assurance from the Minister that wider eligibility for nature conservation will also be recognised by the NHMF—the national heritage memorial fund—and that things will be on a more equal footing generally, not only through lottery funding but in terms of the conservation of nature and the built environment in general. Problems have undoubtedly been identified, as happened with the 1995 report on biodiversity. There is a great deal of work to do.

We welcome what the Minister said about the Victoria County History, since Staffordshire, the county of which I represent a part, is an especially fine example. I join the Minister in paying tribute to those who, like your colleague, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and like many Members of the House of Lords, have pressed for the change. I am glad that the Government have responded and clarified that aspect.

We have not always been as careful as we ought to have been about our local histories and oral histories, and our industrial heritage. We welcome the fact that those will now be taken within the ambit of the two funds.

We welcome not only the widening of the powers but the fact that more bodies will be eligible. The definition of eligibility for receiving funds should range more widely than the public bodies and charities established for a heritage purpose that it covers at present. As we understand the Bill, the new definition will mean that the criteria for eligibility for applying for funds will be both the heritage importance of the project and the public good. Anybody who is doing valuable heritage work will now be eligible to apply to the two funds and to receive grants.

Of course, that will include the private sector—another area that we need to explore in Committee. We welcome the idea in principle, but we foresee certain problems, which we can examine, although not necessarily tonight. In particular, we should like to hear an assurance from the Minister, either tonight or in Committee, that, just as the private houses he mentioned will be eligible, other areas of our heritage that are in private hands will be eligible, too.

For example, there are some wonderful examples of 1930s architecture in privately owned cinemas. Whether those will fall within the remit of funding remains to be seen. What about our industrial heritage, including premises that, although they may be in use at the moment, may also be listed buildings? There are many such in Yorkshire and Lancashire, and people have encountered difficulties in modernising and expanding them while maintaining the heritage.

The Minister, in common with other hon. Members, may have received an interesting letter from a company called Leigh Spinners, from Leigh in Lancashire, on that subject. That is another area that is worth exploring in Committee.

By and large, we support the widening both of the powers and of the eligibility of recipient bodies, but I want to put on record the fact that there are some serious problems to be addressed. In allowing the private sector access to heritage lottery funding, it is vital that genuine access, rather than token access, be made a priority.

Inevitably, there will also be problems involving clawback, when there is appreciation or development of privately owned sites that have received funding. For instance, it is the public interest that theatres in the west end of London in private hands, which are often fine works by architects such as Masham, should receive grants. I believe that applications are in train to the arts lottery board. It appears that the Bill would allow application on architectural grounds for privately owned theatres to the heritage lottery fund. We support that, but the system of matching funding must be different from and more rigorous than that for applications from publicly-owned theatres.

There is also the problem of how means testing will be done on private houses and theatres, and how development appreciation will be clawed back if capital appreciation results from lottery funding. There are concerns that require clarification. It was not clear from the debate in the other place whether the Government have thought them out.

The Minister gave a rather bland assurance that the Government's position on additionality remained the same. Baroness Trumpington, on Second Reading, stated:

> "The Government have always made it clear that money raised by the lottery for good causes was and is intended to be additional to public expenditure. The Government will not reduce public spending programmes to take account of awards from the lottery. That commitment cannot, however, mean that the Government should set aside the issue of what they can afford to spend on any programme which benefits from lottery funds compared to any other public expenditure programme. The opposite view would be to give an automatic protection to lottery-supported programmes which was not available to others. Such a result would be absurd."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 4 November 1996; Vol. 575, c. 567.]

There is an internal logic in that, but if one thinks about her view, one sees that it lets the Treasury or the Department of National Heritage make allowances in apportioning grant aid. That opens the door to the end of the additionality principle—a process that is already evident in some grants.

The Minister gave a partial view of the way in which English Heritage has been treated. He mentioned its slight funding increase this year, but, over the past few years, it has fared badly. There is no doubt that the new funds will do work that would otherwise have been done by English Heritage in some respects. In that sense, they are replacing money that should come through grant aid. The Minister slid off that point far too easily, especially in relation to the British museum, which my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow very properly raised.

[Mr. Mark Fisher]

What the Minister said is wrong. If he was seeking to put the blame for the British museum's financial problems on bad management, he would do well to reconsider. People who know and love the British museum will take his criticisms very hard.

Mr. Sproat: I did not make them.

Mr. Fisher: The Minister threw a very partial light on the report and on who is responsible for the situation that faces the trustees of the British museum. I hope that in his reply, he will acknowledge the excellent work of the British museum and its very good trustees. In Dr. Robert Anderson it has one of the best national museum directors. Any other interpretation of the Minister's words would not be appreciated by the museum world, and would be unjust to good people and good work. I hope that he will reconsider what he said, because it is easy to put a malign interpretation on it.

The Minister was disingenuous about additionality in relation to the British museum. He knows perfectly well that national museums, such as the British museum, the Tate gallery, the national gallery and the national portrait gallery, that do not charge for admission, receive a far worse allocation of grant aid from his Department than museums that charge. He was reported in the press as having tacitly acknowledged that he and the Secretary of State took into account the charging policy of museums when apportioning grant aid. He discriminated against those that do not charge.

Mr. Sproat *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Fisher: He denies it, but the record is that museums that do not charge have been penalised this year. That is an extraordinarily hostile political act, which puts his remarks this evening in a different context.

Mr. Dalyell: I was taken aback when the Minister replied to my question about the British museum. I endorse everything that my hon. Friend has said. We will come back to the matter in Committee. Some marvellous exhibitions have been laid on for the whole of Europe by the British museum, such as the current Chinese exhibition arranged by Carole Michaelson and her colleagues in the oriental department.

Mr. Fisher: I agree with my hon. Friend. In the spirit of Christmas, we should assume that the Minister misspoke, and that he will put the record right when he replies. If he does not, people will be shocked and depressed by an unwarranted attack on a very fine museum and a very fine director.

Additionality is much more complicated than the Minister suggested. He raised the charging policy of museums. It sits strangely with the Bill's avowed interest in increased access that he has been encouraging them to charge by giving favourable funding to those that charge. He has been celebrating those that charge. He well knows that, whenever a museum introduces charges, access to it declines.

Mr. Sproat: Rubbish.

Mr. Fisher: I shall give way to the Minister.

Mr. Sproat: Has the hon. Gentleman not seen the figures for the imperial war museum? Before it introduced charges, it made people go through turnstiles so it knows exactly how many people visited. After it started charging, the number went up. Even with the science museum, where it is claimed that admissions went down, Sir Neil Cossons does not believe that that was the case, because no proper accounting was done before the introduction of charging. The museum's logbooks give ludicrous numbers of visitors for one day; it would have been impossible for it to hold so many people. For the imperial war museum, we have it in arithmetical black and white that there are more visitors; in the case of the science museum, Sir Neil Cossons believes that there are.

Mr. Fisher: The Minister should examine the history of charging museums. He will find that attendance at the national museum of Wales, the natural history museum and others has declined with the introduction of charging. He is right to say that it is difficult to say by precisely how much it has declined, because figures were kept on a fairly random, variable basis. No one disputes that; the Minister should not get so exercised. However, he cannot pray in aid precise figures. He should know that there were particular circumstances about the year after the imperial war museum introduced charges involving certain exhibitions. We are talking about the core collection.

If the Minister knew the history of the imperial war museum, which was very well run by Dr. Alan Borg, he would know that he is not comparing like with like. He is not comparing the figures for core collections; he is talking about specific exhibitions. The important thing about charging does not relate to special exhibitions, for which all museums and galleries sometimes charge, but to access to the core collections. They have been invested in and acquired by the public, who are now being denied free and open access to them. No doubt we will return to the issue, but the Minister should look at his statistics a little more carefully.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Is the hon. Gentleman not tending to underestimate the problems faced by the British museum? As I understand it, even if it introduces charging on the basis of the recommendations, it would still be faced with a shortage of resources for further development and might have to contemplate redundancies.

Mr. Fisher: The right hon. Gentleman will know that one relevant factor is that, when the British library moves out of the Reading Room, the British museum will lose a substantial amount of income, but the Government have not yet made it clear that they will fully compensate it. *[Interruption.]* If the Minister wants to intervene to say that the British museum will be fully funded and fully compensated for the loss of that revenue, that would be most welcome. I am happy to give way to him if he wishes to put that on the record, rather than do it from a sedentary position.

Mr. Sproat: I did not expect to have to go through the Red Book—after all, it is not all that long since we had the Budget—but it makes it quite clear that, for years two and three, the British museum will indeed be recompensed for the removal of the British library. That is absolutely black and white.

Mr. Fisher: I hope that that recompense will be full, and that there will be no shortfall. The right hon. Member

for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) is quite right to say that there are problems over and above those connected with the loss of the British library, but the British museum is a well-run institution, with a huge international reputation. We should recognise that it is a cultural jewel for the country. We should be proud of it, and fund it accordingly.

Leaving aside those differences, the Opposition support the general thrust of the Bill, which fits in well with some of the good recommendations of "Treasures in Trust". One problem with that report, however, is the slight hostility towards local authorities. The Bill encourages greater educational work in a sector that has suffered from Government policy.

Schools museum services around the country, and the number of school visits to museums, have declined because of the Government's hostility towards local education authorities. I welcome the fact that the Bill will fund educational projects, but new initiatives in such projects will be funded in the context of a general decline in support for the schools museum services, which are the bedrock infrastructure of heritage education in our schools. I hope that the Minister will understand that, and work more closely with the Department for Education and Employment.

We believe that the Bill represents a move in the right direction. The emphasis that it places on the natural environment and access, and its wider definition of eligibility, are in line with the Opposition's policies. It admirably prepares the way for a Labour Government, who will have a far more positive attitude towards our heritage and cultural life. For that reason, we commend the Bill to the House.

6.42 pm

Mr. Simon Coombs (Swindon): It is an immense pleasure to contribute to the debate on a Bill that I greatly welcome, because, for the past five years, other hon. Members and I have called for it.

We debate the Bill against the background of the extraordinary success of the national lottery. The difference that lottery funding is making to the arts, heritage and sport is quite extraordinary and, dare I say it, beyond the dreams of avarice. In the past few months, however, it has become clear to the Government that one sector of our national heritage is missing out. I welcome the Government's commitment to put that right.

In debates on the lottery and tourism in 1994 and 1995, I asked for such a Bill to be introduced. On 24 June 1994, I said in the House:

"The lottery can significantly enhance our ability to restore and preserve the built heritage of Britain, as well as its museums and galleries.

But what about those parts of the heritage that are still in private hands and are so excellently represented by the Historic Houses Association? Is the Minister willing to see funds made available to the owners of the great houses, castles and palaces of Britain on appropriate terms? If not, we may find ourselves contributing to a form of creeping nationalisation, which would be wrong."—[*Official Report*, 24 June 1994; Vol. 245, c. 464.]

On 30 March 1995, I said in the House:

"Private sector heritage sites and historic houses will face a problem as a result of the regulation that provides that the lottery's proceeds can go only to public or charitable bodies. Privately owned historic houses will have to achieve charitable status to benefit, which will create considerable problems for many of their owners. The tax regime burdens the owners of historic houses and, as a result, dilapidation is continuing and the heritage is suffering. I hope that my right hon. Friend will not lose sight of that problem and will continue to look at ways in which help can be given to preserve our national built heritage that is in private hands."—[*Official Report*, 30 March 1995; Vol. 257, c. 1256.]

The cavalry has arrived today.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): It is Christmas.

Mr. Coombs: Yes, the Bill will bring the cheer of Christmas to many owners of historic houses, which, until now, have been threatened with dilapidation or closure.

I want to contribute to the debate because of the importance of our heritage to tourism. Last year, 23.7 million foreign visitors came to Britain, no doubt for a variety of reasons, but their desire to see our heritage must have been one of the strongest. Some argue that the Government do not give enough money to the arts, our heritage and tourism, but the lottery, which is enabling us to enhance our tourist attractions, will lead to a growth in the number of visitors. One could think of many examples of such attractions, but I shall limit myself to one. The new Tate gallery of modern art at the Bankside power station site, not far from the House, will undoubtedly attract to London many more visitors who love modern art.

The opportunities to entice more visitors to Britain will more than offset any reduction that the Government may seek to make in the money that they give to the British Tourist Authority or the English tourist board because of difficult financial times. We have created a honeypot, and the bees are coming to it from around the world.

I do not need to labour the importance of our heritage to tourism, because those who are present are well aware of that. Tourism will continue to be a massive generator of jobs, but that must be judged against the background of the degeneration of the infrastructure of so much of our heritage. The work needed to maintain our heritage goes on constantly, and in a sense gets more difficult every year because our heritage ages every year. That decay is all very well when people want to look at ruins. Stonehenge would look pretty odd if we rebuilt it, and I hope that we never do. It would obviously be nonsense to suggest that our prehistoric or Roman heritage should be kept in anything other than its current condition, but what about our heritage from the Jacobean and Tudor eras, which is in private hands and has suffered serious decay over many decades?

British people's interest and that of visitors in our joint heritage is intense and growing. There is no doubt that our generation is far more aware of our past and the importance of our history than any generation that came before it.

I am lucky enough to represent the constituency in which the Royal Commission for Historical Monuments for England has been relocated. I pay tribute to the work of Tom Hassall and his staff. They have created an extraordinarily rich treasure trove, which is now being explored by more and more visitors who come to see our monuments.

There is a growth of interest in this country's industrial heritage, so I welcome the Bill's provision to enable access to our industrial heritage and to promote education so that younger generations will become aware of the United Kingdom's industrial heritage.

[Mr. Coombs]

In that context, I want to refer to another project in my constituency. The Great Western Railway museum in Swindon has occupied an extremely small building for many years, and a project is now before the national heritage memorial fund to convert a much larger building on the old railway works site into a magnificent new railway museum. It is an imaginative scheme, which is supported by the local council, and it could, in time, create a national railway museum of the south, which might complement—but not, I hope, rival—the excellent museum in York.

Interest in railways is intense in Swindon, which has a railway history that is the envy of other towns. That interest is not limited to Swindon and the surrounding area, but is matched by interest throughout the country and around the world. The romance of the Great Western Railway—God's wonderful railway—and of steam brings together people of all ages, each of whom has a small boy or small girl inside who is trying to escape, in remembering the days when they stood on the platform watching the steam engines of the past. I hope that those memories will be found in Swindon's museum of the future.

Mr. Stephen: Does my hon. Friend agree that the importance of a railway museum is that the locomotives should be kept in working order, so that we can see them, hear them and smell them in action and not look at them sitting in a building as a static exhibit?

Mr. Coombs: I welcome that intervention and assure my hon. Friend that there is every intention of providing a linking line from the main Great Western line to the museum, so that railway engines can be moved off the country's main railway network into the museum. It is also intended that a workshop will be created, where people will be able to watch engines being worked on by railway engineers—there are many such engineers living in my constituency who would love to get back to work, albeit in a museum, in order to demonstrate the skills that they mastered in their working lives. In addition, such engines as King George V and Caerphilly Castle will be on display and I look forward to selling my hon. Friend a ticket to the museum when it is built. However, I must stick to my subject and not allow our mutual love of railways—with which I am sure all hon. Members were born—to cause me to stray too far.

We must strike a note of caution. The NHMF and the heritage lottery fund are soon likely to be over-subscribed; despite the success of the lottery, there are more projects awaiting consideration than there are resources to fund them. It is therefore inevitable that some discrimination will be necessary and projects will have to be worth while and well thought out if they are to succeed in obtaining grant funding.

It is not only councils such as my own that are making bids to the HLF; I am glad to say that, rightly, many individuals are seeking to preserve heritage in their area. A quarter of a mile away from the railway museum is a scheme to save the mechanics institution—a building constructed in the 1950s by the Great Western Railway in order to educate its work force and give them an opportunity to understand the cultural advances of the Victorian era. Long before the Education Act 1944 and the Arts Council, an enlightened capitalist company sought to give its employees access to education. The institution was a magnificent building, but it has been closed for many years and has fallen into total disrepair.

As part of the work undertaken a few years ago by candidates of the Common Purpose organisation, a group of people got together to see whether the mechanics institution could be saved from its current state of disrepair. I pay tribute to the efforts of, in the first instance, Colin Grattan and, more recently, Martha Parry and Donald Brunwin, who have tried to put together a project that could be the subject of a bid to the HLF. However, such ad hoc organisations find it extremely difficult to gain access to the professionalism that is necessary to make such projects work and to bring them to a standard that the HLF will accept.

I put it to my hon. Friend the Minister that there is room for help to be given at an early stage, to evaluate schemes while they are still merely a dream or a principle at stake and to determine whether they are worth developing further. Recently, I had the opportunity of discussing that point with the chief executive of the NHMF, Anthea Case, and she assured me that anyone coming to the fund would be given as much help as possible, and I pay tribute to that helpful and understanding attitude among the NHMF's staff. There is a gap, which we could do more to fill by reaching out to people who have dreams and who want to try to help preserve our heritage. I would welcome an opportunity at a later stage to look for ways in which that might be achieved. There are obvious financial implications, but they need not be excessive, and I hope that my hon. Friend will consider the matter.

That brings me to a more general point that should be taken into account when discussing the Bill—matching funds. In a recent debate on tourism, I talked about the problem of matching funds. I draw the House's attention to an example that I cited then: a proposal to give Kennet and Avon Canal Trust £25 million from the HLF. That was welcomed with enormous enthusiasm in Wiltshire and elsewhere along the line of the Kennet and Avon canal, but since the announcement was made, it has become clear that the matching funds needed to enable the scheme to go ahead are considerable—around £7 million has to be found from local sources, and that is not an easy task.

I put it to my hon. Friend that, sooner or later, we shall have to revisit the question of matching funds. If we have decided that a project is sufficiently worth while for us to devote £25 million to it, are we really saying that, if it proves impossible to find matching funds, we do not want the scheme to go ahead at all? We are in danger of appearing to say that. I hope that there will be some flexibility in assessing the quality of projects. They should not be assessed in the context of determining whether there is enough local enthusiasm.

There is always tremendous local enthusiasm for such projects, but there is a limit to the sum that we can ask local authorities to provide out of their necessarily limited budget. There is a limit to how much we can ask the private sector to contribute at local level. All hon. Members know of the constant pressure on the larger employing companies in any area to provide funding for charitable and voluntary organisations. There is a limit to what local fund raisers can raise. A canal stretching

100-odd miles from Bristol to London is not a local project and will not be easily funded locally to the tune of about £7 million. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will have some thoughts on that subject, if not this afternoon, some time during the Bill's passage through the House.

The hon. Member for Stoke–on–Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) mentioned access. Of course we would agree that when we give money to, for example, historic houses, it is right to insist on public access—that lottery money cannot be used to prop up a house for its own sake.

We need to be sensitive. Some projects that are proposed as a result of the Bill's passage will involve very small houses that are still family homes. The idea that the general public should have an absolute, unfettered right to tramp through various rooms in those smaller houses lacks sensitivity. The principle of public access is right and obviously we must ensure that we do not go to the other extreme of handing over funds without public access, but I hope that sensitivity will be shown in deciding appropriate access.

Let us suppose that a house is a jewel set in a landscape and is threatened with dilapidation to the point of being unsafe and needing to be pulled down. Are we saying that, in those circumstances, the heritage is not worth saving as a jewel in the landscape, even if the public will have access only to the parkland? Are we insisting that every room or a selection of rooms should be available? I seek from my hon. Friend the Minister a clue as to his thinking on that matter because, in my view, if we create too rigid a principle, we are in danger of ruling out our ability to help smaller houses, which are part of our heritage.

I very much welcome the Bill. It will create difficulties in terms of achieving a balance between the resources available to English Heritage and the national heritage memorial fund, but I am certain that that balance can be achieved and that, overall, the Bill's effect is benign. I welcome the fact that, after two years, the Government have concluded that ownership should not be an issue, and I very much hope that the Bill has a speedy passage.

7.2 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The general welcome that the Bill has evoked reflects the widespread hope that many projects that have not been eligible for national heritage memorial fund help will, as a result of the enlargement of the scope of the funds and of those to whom moneys may be paid, bring about the restoration of heritage, and in some cases the creation of new facilities.

The Bill, although short, is important. It should be made plain that the Bill will not increase the money that the fund disperses. The cake is the same size, although the plates on which the slices are to be distributed will be substantially increased.

Most of the important points about the Bill have been made. I had supposed that it would be largely uncontroversial. It may have been slightly provocative to focus so much attention on the Bill's purpose—to increase access to heritage—at a time when access appears to be threatened by other policies of the Government.

The issue that has sparked a small explosion on both sides of the House—the funding of the British museum—is important. I venture with caution to step into that ring. When the Minister intervened in the speech of the hon. Member for Stoke–on–Trent Central (Mr. Fisher) to say that he sought neither to encourage nor to discourage museums regarding a charging policy, he inadvertently adopted an inappropriate attitude for a Minister of the Crown and protector of the public interest.

Many of the great national collections have been accumulated on the assumption that they would remain free and open to access by all citizens, and a large proportion of the donations were explicitly made on that assumption. It is the duty of Ministers of the Crown, in their attitude to charging, to reflect that consideration. Neutrality about whether the British museum charges is not an appropriate posture. Neutrality about whether the national gallery receives, or must rule itself out from receiving, the benefits of Sir Denis Mahon's bounty is not a matter on which a Minister responsible for heritage should be neutral.

Although the task of taking decisions on such questions lies with the trustees, Ministers of the Crown cannot be mute on those issues and should make it plain that, as a matter of public policy, it is desirable that the great national collections remain free and open to access. Those collections should not be saved up for the rare special visit to London. They should be regarded as an archive for reference purposes, to be visited frequently, to be dropped in upon on occasion, when the spirit so moves a visitor, perhaps only to look at a single item, to compare it, reflect on it and be moved and inspired by it. It should not be necessary to purchase that access. Those who have charged for such access, in places such as the Victoria and Albert museum, have diminished our heritage by introducing that charging principle.

The question whether charging diminishes attendance at museums was not conclusively answered by the Minister's intervention about the imperial war museum, based on a relatively short period. There is a pretty strong a priori case against charging, as many people on limited incomes immediately exclude non-necessary expenditure from their spending. Although there have been vast numbers of visitors to the British museum from other countries—notably the United States—who regard much of what is there as world heritage, want to see it when they visit and are well able to afford to pay, there are ways of inducing such visitors to contribute to the costs other than compulsory charging, which adversely affects the least well-off members of our community.

I did not intend to comment on that matter at length. I simply wanted to note the irony that we are considering a Bill designed to increase access against that background. Having noted that, I shall pass on. However, before passing on, I want to ask the Minister whether it is wrong to view the expenditure decisions on museums in the Budget as not revealing Government policy. That double negative may be difficult to follow, but it certainly appeared that museums with a charging policy were favoured by the Budget and those with no such policy, or with a policy of not charging, did not find favour. The British museum, among them, suffered a cut in its grant of £1.3 million. That cannot have been entirely accidental. It was certainly widely believed to be the Government's intention to move in that direction. If the Government want to disavow that intention on the record, they ought to look again at their funding arrangements for the national museums and galleries, whose acquisition fund in particular is under considerable pressure.

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

The hon. Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) spoke about the mechanics institution, which I had the privilege of seeing on a recent visit to Swindon. I share his enthusiasm for the project and hope that it will be a successful applicant for assistance. I, too, have projects which I cherish and which I hope, as a result of the Bill, will be eligible for assistance.

I was interested to hear what the Minister said about the possibility of townscape heritage being brought within the ambit of the national heritage memorial fund. I have been thinking for some time that the townscape of Wick in Caithness—particularly Pulteneytown, built to a plan by Telford, and one of the first examples of a grid townscape in Scotland—is a site of great historic interest that needs substantial expenditure to restore it to its former glory. The fact that, under the Bill, multiple ownership will not stand in the way of applications for assistance should help projects such as the one at Wick to put together suitable applications for assistance.

On the limited question of access, I question whether the words in the Bill about imposing a duty on trustees to

"bear in mind the desirability of public access"

go far enough. That seems to be a subjective test, which is scarcely adequate to reflect the view of hon. Members on both sides of the House that public access is a proper consideration when determining whether money should be paid out.

There are obviously some objects that it would not be possible to keep on permanent display to the public; they may be very fragile, for instance. That sort of consideration should mean that it is not an absolute duty to offer public access in all circumstances. Quite apart from the difficulty of demonstrating whether the trustees have discharged their duty in this respect, the phrase does not go far enough. I therefore commend to the Government a phrase that could be subjected to a more objective test, such as: "The trustees shall give due weight to the significance of public access." I acknowledge that that is a Committee point, but, as I may not have the opportunity to serve on the Committee, I want to make it now.

I noted what the Minister said about the Government's intention to alter the provisions on the remuneration of trustees. I welcome the arguments behind that proposal. On the other hand, I notice that the same clause makes the somewhat surprising proposal that the trustees

"may appoint such officers and servants as they think fit, on such terms . . . as they think fit".

That seems rather sweeping, although it may be standard practice with public bodies. Perhaps the Government will consider introducing guidance; the absolute discretion proposed in the Bill may not be right for a public body of this kind.

In general, I welcome the Bill and its widening of the eligibility criteria. I welcome the new emphasis on access and education, on information technology and on species conservation. I believe that it will enable the fund to do many of the things that it has wanted to do but has hitherto been prevented from doing. I hope that the legislation can be speedily enacted.

7.15 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): I welcome the opportunity to follow the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan)—in Milton's line, he and I were

"nursed upon the self-same hill".

I recall his attitude to the original National Lottery etc. Bill. I do not allude to it in any spirit of unkindness on this occasion, but I am delighted to note that, despite his opposition to the legislation, he has retained his interest in the subjects that we are discussing tonight.

I apologise to the House for my brief absence at the start of the debate during the Minister's speech. The coincidence of Christmas and the arrival of the recess has meant that one's time is not entirely one's own. I therefore apologise if anything that I say is expressed in ignorance of anything that the Minister may have said when opening the debate.

I welcome the Bill, not least as it gives us the opportunity to praise the national heritage memorial fund and its trustees for their admirable conduct, performance, services and achievements over the past sixteen and a half years. I appreciate the antecedents of the Bill and the need to give greater freedom and flexibility to the trustees to perform—not least through the heritage lottery fund—tasks which everyone believes desirable. That has clearly been the consensus this evening.

I also recognise that the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 is not without its occasional critics. I was not the architect of the Act—we could start a decent-sized architectural practice with those who claim to have been its architect—but I had a subordinate job in the master mason's department. I hope that, over the next sixteen and a half years, it will come to be seen as having been a leather, not an iron, harness, which has enabled sensible and even regular changes to be made to the working of the national lottery, without the need to return to primary legislation.

I have not followed the debate in the other place, so I do not know whether the issue of English Heritage working abroad came up there. Some years ago, the National Heritage Select Committee said that it would be desirable if English Heritage were released to work abroad. I had hoped that this occasion might be taken to give legislative cover to that idea. My hon. Friend may tell me that no such cover is necessary; I hope that he will not tell me that such freedom is not desirable. Although English Heritage's headquarters is in my constituency, I stress that it has given me no briefing on this subject, and that I am not speaking on its behalf.

Matching funds are an important subject; I dare say they will be returned to in Standing Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) mentioned the Kennet and Avon canal. I declare an interest as a patron of the partnership project and the appeal application. I thought that he was perhaps a little unfair to everybody concerned when he alluded to the £25 million for a project that everybody believes should happen but did not mention the immense amount of work that the local community had already done. That was a vivid demonstration of how desirable it was that the project should be carried through.

Mr. Simon Coombs: I did not wish to suggest in what I said earlier that I had anything other than the greatest admiration for the work that had already been done.

I merely wished to point out how much more difficult it would be to find further funding, as opposed to the fund-raising that had been done. A huge extra burden will fall on the people in the localities along the length of the canal and it will be difficult for them to match the £25 million, as I am sure my right hon. Friend agrees.

Mr. Brooke: I take that point totally, and matching funding is a subject to which we should return.

I make the briefest possible reference to the Victoria County History, which has already been mentioned in the debate. Three Government Departments—the then Department for Education, the Department of National Heritage and the Department of the Environment—all sought to avoid taking responsibility for the Victoria County History. The Commission in Brussels believed that the British have a better co-ordinated civil service than any other country in the Union, but that problem was not a classic example of it working well. Co-operation between the three Departments might have solved the problem, but I am delighted that rescue has arrived through the amendment to the Bill in the Lords.

I am also delighted that the amendment was initiated by my noble Friend Lord Beloff. Parenthetically, he was a senior member of the library committee of the Oxford union when I was an officer of the union. I am delighted to enrol under his flag in this cause. Both of us were enrolled under the banner of the senior librarian of the union—I shall be brief in this diversion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I hope that you will not pull me up—Canon Claude Jenkins, who was a remarkable figure and had been the librarian of Lambeth palace. He was not a man of the tidiest disposition, and his fellow canons in Christ Church felt that his garden should be tidied up. They decided to pay for a gardener, but they received a note in Canon Jenkins' enchanting and spidery hand saying, "By order of Canon Jenkins, his garden has this day been consecrated as a bird sanctuary." I bring him into the debate because his garden would clearly have been one of the beneficiaries under the Bill.

I also wish to pay tribute to C. R. Elrington, the former editor of the Victoria County History, who has undertaken an enormous sponsored journey up and down the length of this land in the past year to raise money for the history. I believe that he raised £27,000. One of his stopping places was a couple of miles from where I was staying in August this year. His journey was worthy of Defoe or Lady Celia Fiennes and, given that his itinerary was so detailed that it included exactly when he would be having breakfast, I was tempted, in the spirit of those earlier travellers, to go and observe both the breakfast and his departure, to cheer and huzza. The journey was enormously to his credit, but I am pleased that the Bill will mean that such enormous travels will not be so necessary in the future.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend may be interested to know that there is a connection between C. R. Elrington, Canon Jenkin's and myself. C. R. Elrington and I both listened to Canon Jenkins's lectures on the Theodosian code.

Mr. Brooke: A debate of this sort is improved and enhanced by intelligence such as I have just received from my right hon. Friend, especially given the subject that we are discussing.

The last time that I offered my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench my participation in the Committee stage of a Bill, I am sorry to say that it was refused. I am therefore a little diffident about making the offer again, but the Bill is sufficiently important to me that I am happy to swallow my pride and do so. However, I should not sail under false colours, and I shall close with a brief word about museum charges, because they have been mentioned in the debate already.

I have no inherent objection to the principle of museum charges per se, but a distinction should conceivably be made between museums about whether charges are desirable. I am delighted that huge numbers of people visit our museums in London. We are periodically told by journalists how much better the French order such matters with the Louvre, but it is significant that far more people visit museums in London than visit museums in Paris.

My anxiety is that some potential visitors need to approach museums cautiously and try them out, not because of the public face of the museum but because they are unfamiliar with, or frightened by, the contents of the museum. People need to test the water and find out whether they like what is inside museums. I have an uneasy feeling that charging for entry to somewhere such as the British museum might cause some people never to go inside, when both my hon. Friend the Minister and I would wish them to become addicts of that culture. Charging might hinder that. I shall not labour the point: I merely wish to enter it as part of the spirit of the debate. In total, I support the Bill warmly, and I have greatly enjoyed taking part in the debate.

7.25 pm

Mr. Sproat: I wish to respond briefly to some of the points made in this interesting, if short, debate. In particular, I wish to thank all those right hon. and hon. Members, starting with the hon. Member for Stoke–on–Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), who gave a strong, warm, general welcome to the Bill. I will return in a moment to the charging issue, which was the one area of mildly abrasive acrimony within our gentle debate—I am sure that we shall also return to it in Committee—but first I wish to thank the hon. Gentleman for his warm support for the Bill. He continued the tradition started in the other place, where the Bill was first debated.

The hon. Member for Stoke–on–Trent, Central also raised an interesting point about nature conservation. The national heritage memorial fund is keen to support a wider range of nature conservation projects and the Bill will enable it to do so. Funding will be available, for example, for projects involving conservation of rare species, flora and fauna, and so on. He chose a good example of the widening of the activities of the national heritage memorial fund which it was not able to undertake under the rather restrictive definitions of the National Heritage Act 1980.

My hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson) raised the question of war memorials, which the hon. Member for Stoke–on–Trent, Central also mentioned. It would be possible to help war memorials under the present dispensation, but it may be that the widening of the Bill and the psychological increase in the feeling that more causes can be supported will enable war memorials to receive the care and attention that my hon. Friend mentioned that they need. I hope that we shall return to that important example in greater detail in Committee.

[Mr. Sproat]

The hon. Member for Stoke–on–Trent, Central mentioned the case of privately owned cinemas and industrial premises, and asked whether they would be covered in the Bill. The answer is a firm yes. He also mentioned the case of Leigh mills, and I agree with him. I have been to Leigh mills, although it was some time ago and I cannot remember the exact details. I believe that the building in its present form was built in about 1921 or 1922. I remember that the upper windows are of the architecture of that time. If a building is listed, the owner has to keep it up, which subtracts money from his business and employment. Listing is a difficult area, and Leigh mills is a good example of the problems that arise. It is the sort of case that we should examine in Committee.

The hon. Member for Stoke–on–Trent, Central talked about the clawback. It is not a hypothetical issue. As I said in my opening speech, English Heritage already provides grants to private owners, and there has been a clawback on several occasions. I have looked through the list and, from memory, the biggest clawback in the past few years was £5,500. Sometimes it was £276 or £330. It was nearly always for the sale of a property, although in one case it was for the sale of land. The point is that it has been done, it could be done again and it should be done with rigour. If it is done, that is how it will occur. I give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks in that area.

I turn now to the British museum and to the points raised by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central and subsequently by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan). The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central spoke about the excellence of the British museum. No one doubts the excellence of its scholarship—particularly that of Dr. Anderson, who is of world calibre. However, the mildly disagreeable comments that I made were not my views but those of the Edwards report. The Government did not ask the British museum to conduct an inquiry: the British museum trustees commissioned Mr. Edwards to do it. He found that there were deep and long-standing flaws in the museum's financial and general management, in its organisation and in its general efficiency.

I did not know that the matter would be raised tonight, so I have not refreshed my memory regarding the figures. However, I recall that there has been a 76 per cent. increase in the number of curatorial staff since 1972. That is just one example of the trustees not exercising the kind of control that they might have wished over an expanding staff. My right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir Wyn Roberts) pointed out that, even if charges were introduced, redundancies might still be necessary. That is the view of the Edwards report, not of the Government. It would be extremely sad, but there is a direct correlation between the lax grip on management in the 1970s and the state of the museum today. I am informed that the figure was not 76 per cent. but 70 per cent.—so my memory is not too bad.

The point is that the British museum trustees must decide whether to charge for admission. I know that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland does not agree with that, but the Government believe that such decisions must be left to the trustees. I have a scrap of paper which sets out the details that I gave off the top of my head. As I was out by a few percentage points, perhaps I should refer to it. Of the 10 museums—the British museum, the imperial war museum, the national gallery, the national maritime museum, the national museums and galleries on Merseyside, the national portrait gallery, the natural history museum, the science museum, the Tate gallery and the Victoria and Albert museum—only four received an increase in cash grants between 1992-93 and 1996-97. However, all four charged throughout that entire period, with the exception of the V and A, which began imposing charges in October this year when Dr. Alan Borg—who had seen how well charges worked at the Imperial War museum—was instrumental in introducing them.

There is no question of the Government favouring those museums which charge. It is fair to make that assertion, but it is equally fair for me to refute it utterly. Museums received grant increases this year on the basis of how well they were run—it had absolutely nothing to do with whether or not they charged. I put it to the House and to any fair-minded person that I could not go to Sir Neil Cossens—who has run a very tight ship at the Science museum in the past few years—and say, "Although you have done wonderfully well for your museum, and the British museum is in such a state that it has set up its own inquiry to investigate what has gone wrong, we will not reward you for doing well: we will take money from you and give it to someone who has not done his duty".

That would be deeply unfair.

Some museums received increased grants—the imperial war museum, the maritime museum and others. The hon. Gentleman should be able to remind me of them as he has been going on about it for long enough. The four museums that received increased grants this year did charge for admission, but they were not awarded the grants on that basis. The figures prove that under this Government the museums which do not charge have received more funding. Funding is not based on whether or not museums charge. The facts are irrefutable.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I apologise to my hon. Friend and to the House for coming late to the debate. I went to considerable trouble to be here for seven o'clock, because I was told that it would begin then. The issue must be the survival of the British museum, which is a very special place. Whoever is to blame for what has gone wrong—my hon. Friend has understandably worked himself into a lather about it—the fact is that it is not the scholars or the public, who visit the museum in great numbers. It is crucial that the British museum should remain the flagship of our museums. We must not put the trustees into a straitjacket, restrict the scholarship and make it difficult for people, young and old, to visit the museum.

Mr. Sproat: That is a very important point, but it is not the only one. If museums care well for the artefacts in their charge—as the science museum and the natural history museum have done—it would be unfair to take money away from them to pay for those who have not performed their function. It is the parable of the virgins or the talents—*[Interruption.]* I was groping for the biblical quotation about the wise and the unwise virgins, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Of course, we shall do everything we can to help the British museum, but its trustees must decide whether to charge. We shall be very happy to provide advice or to meet the trustees to discuss the matter. I noticed that the Opposition spokesman did not tell us whether Labour would reinstate compulsory charging in those museums that have removed it already. I see Opposition Front Benchers nodding, so that is another pledge.

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): I was agreeing that my hon. Friend had not told the House.

Mr. Sproat: Perhaps he will tell us now. Labour should tell us whether it intends to reinstate charging. Charging currently brings in £15 million; if the British museum were to put aside the charging option, it would have to find that sum from Government funds. It is yet another example of the Labour party not telling us what it would do in government. I do not care what a Labour Government would do, but Opposition Members should have the courage of their convictions and tell the House whether they would forbid the museums to charge. If they would, they must confirm whether they would compensate the museums.

Mr. Fisher: I am happy that the Minister has given way on an issue that is hardly central to the Bill. We are getting distracted, but the Minister provokes me somewhat.

I shall make our position clear. My right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) has said on numerous occasions that the Labour party wishes to see access to all the core collections of our great national museums returned to the state of being free by the end of the century. To achieve that, we shall work with those museums. It is a matter not of compulsion, but of coherent partnership policies. Having discussed this matter with many of the museums, we believe that we can achieve that by the end of the century.

What a good way to celebrate the millennium—all our great national museums, such as the British museum and the Victoria and Albert, should be free and open to access. If the Minister is serious about the Bill and about our heritage, he should support that principle and work constructively with us when we are in government to ensure that it happens.

Mr. Sproat: That was an absolutely classic Labour weaselly pledge. Labour would like to see that happen by the end of the decade, but the hon. Gentleman did not and dare not say what Labour will do, because the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) will not allow him to do so. All that the right hon. Gentleman allows Labour Members to do is to speak out of one side of their mouths, give a nudge here and a hint there. They say in private that of course they will do that, but when challenged at the Dispatch Box to say whether they will give another £15 million or £25 million to museums, they will not say.

Mr. Fisher: The Minister has such a crude and unimaginative understanding of these matters. As he said, it is not within the power of Government either to compel or to prevent charges. We believe that it is wrong, and we will work with those galleries and museums to ensure that charging ends. We will not compel them, and we will certainly not fully fund them. The museums that do not charge have had roughly the same budget treatment, but they have deployed their resources differently to ensure that they do not have to charge. They have not received more favourable treatment than those museums that have chosen to charge. We believe that the museums that have charged could have organised their affairs in such a way that, like the Tate or the British museum, they did not need to charge.

We hope that, in the next three years, we can work with the museums, using lottery money and their grant in aid, but we will not give them favourable treatment, and we will certainly not compensate them for giving up charges. We believe that they can reorganise their budgets by the end of the century, and we will work with them to that end. We will not compel them to do so. As the Minister said, it is a matter for the trustees. We believe that most trustees want access to their core collections to be free. They will be working over the next three years with a Government who are positive on that point.

Mr. Sproat: That was another fudge. We still do not know whether Labour will give the museums £15 million. The hon. Gentleman is wrong: the museums that have not charged have received more in the past five years. That is not because they do not charge; it is just a matter of fact. I have given the figures.

As ever, my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) made a much more sensible speech. He talked about the lottery's great success, and was extremely modest about the fact that he was one of the first to say that private owners needed more help. Two thirds of listed houses are in private ownership. It was ludicrous that those private owners could not be helped, but now they will be.

My hon. Friend is an expert on tourism. Last year, 24 million tourists—a record number—visited this country. One of the main reasons why they come here is our heritage. The Bill will greatly help the tourist industry. The problem of matching funds is serious, and I look forward to returning to that issue in Committee.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland gave a general warm welcome to the Bill. He made some interesting points that we shall return to in Committee. I also look forward to discussing his major disagreement with me about charging for admission to museums.

My right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) said that English Heritage should be able to work abroad. He is right. It was partly with that ambition in mind that, earlier this year, English Heritage established its former direct labour force as an independent company, which is now able to use its considerable skills on projects beyond these shores. It is not the Bill that will allow that: it was English Heritage's wise and prescient move in setting itself up as an independent force.

With those few and gentle words, I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation,

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CONTRACTING OUT

That the draft Local Authorities (Contracting Out of Allocation of Housing and Homelessness Functions) Order 1996, which was laid before this House on 28th November, be approved.

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications and Deemed Applications) (Amendment) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 2nd December, be approved.

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (SCOTLAND)

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications and Deemed Applications) (Scotland) Regulations 1997, which were laid before this House on 2nd December, be approved.

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Social Security (Incapacity for Work and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 2nd December, be approved.

RATING AND VALUATION

That the draft Non-Domestic Rating (Chargeable Amounts for Small Hereditaments) Regulations 1996, which were laid before this House on 9th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

Question agreed to.

STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES

Ordered,

That Sir David Mitchell be discharged from the Committee on Standards and Privileges and Mr. John MacGregor be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

Standard Spending Assessment (Hounslow)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Coe.]*

7.45 pm

Mr. Nirj Joseph Deva (Brentford and Isleworth): I am most grateful to have this Adjournment debate, which I presume will be the last debate in 1996. It is wholly apposite that the last debate of the year should be on behalf of my constituents in Brentford, Isleworth, Hounslow and Chiswick, especially the most vulnerable and dependent who are looking to the House for help.

I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to bring to the House's attention the position on the Government's standard spending assessment for the London borough of Hounslow and the way in which the Labour-controlled council in Hounslow is wilfully ignoring the interests of its residents.

I am sorry that neither the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), whose party controls Hounslow council, nor the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who is the Labour party spokesman on local government, is present to participate in the debate. I am extremely sorry that no one from the Labour party is present to listen to a debate on matters relating to the borough of Hounslow and the concerns of the people who live there. I shall take note that no one from the Labour party has bothered to be present, and I shall make it known to all my constituents that Labour Members do not care.

I wrote to the Leader of the Opposition on 6 December about his party's proposals in Hounslow. All I have received 12 days later is a brief acknowledgement that my letter has been passed to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. My constituents will be interested to know that neither of them is here to defend their party's position. Perhaps they are too ashamed, or simply do not care any more about the old, the infirm, the battered or the dispossessed.

In my letter to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield, I addressed him as "Dear Tony"—it is nice to talk about "Dear Tony" letters. I wrote:

"I am writing with some indignation and outrage that your Labour Council in Hounslow is riding roughshod over the views of local people, including two of your own Labour Councillors, Cllr Vanessa Smith and Cllr Pat Nicholas, to penalise some of the most vulnerable members of my constituency.

I refer to the proposed closure by Hounslow Council of the Isleworth Day Care Centre, which enables hundreds of elderly and vulnerable people to receive care and support; and the proposed closure of the Chiswick Family Centre which helps disadvantaged children and their families.

Last year, Hounslow Council had a budget of £196 million. The Government's recent SSA announcement has enabled the Council to raise its total spending by another £3,790,000. The cost of keeping the Isleworth Day Care Centre open is £235,000 and that of the Chiswick Family Centre £30,000. This represents just 0.133 per cent. of the Council's total budget and more important less than 7 per cent. of the increase in SSA that has been granted to the Council"

by the Government

"for next year.

"It is outrageous that the Council should attempt to make cheap political points by attacking the most vulnerable, especially after receiving this additional assistance from the Government.

It is simply mind-boggling that two of your own Councillors, who want the centres kept OPEN have been suspended from the Labour Party for their efforts. Is this what 'New' Labour stands for?"

I am glad to see that a member of the Labour party has arrived to listen to what I have to say.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North–West): I was just passing through.

Mr. Deva: I note that the hon. Gentleman has now "passed through".

The letter continues:

"Your Labour Council should get its priorities right and keep the Isleworth Day Care Centre and the Chiswick Families Centre OPEN. The two Labour Councillors should be re-instated and the closure plans cancelled forthwith."

That was nearly two weeks ago, but, as I said, I have received no reply, which speaks volumes in itself.

Last year, the Government gave Hounslow £98.9 million in revenue support grant; next year, that will be increased to £102.7 million—a rise of £3.8 million. Each year, the Government gives every local authority a standard spending assessment, or SSA, which constitutes their assessment of how much it should cost a local authority to provide a standard level of service. That governs the distribution of revenue support grant to each council. In addition to the revenue support grant, local authorities receive money from the Government through business rates, and they also raise funds through the council tax.

SSAs are built up from various separate elements for various services—education, social services, police, fire, highway maintenance and other services. The different geographical and social characteristics of each area are taken into account, such as the number of children, the number of elderly people and the number who need care. SSAs are a means of calculating Government grant distribution to different local authorities. They constitute neither a limit nor a target for local authorities' actual expenditure, but, all being equal, a higher SSA leads to a higher level of grant from the Government.

It is interesting to note what the Government have been giving Hounslow council. For the past few years, the council has regularly received increases in its SSA. In 1990, the SSA was £124 million; by 1993, it was £165.6 million. That rose to £170.4 million in 1994, £178.7 million in 1995 and £185.6 million last year; and the figure will be a massive £188.9 million in 1997. Next year—after we have allowed for the increase in Government grant and the fact that the council will, as ever, increase its council tax—Hounslow will, for the first time in its history, have a budget of more than £200 million.

I thank the Government for their fair treatment of Hounslow in allocating resources. I think it worth placing on record additional sums given through the single regeneration grant: a further £13 million has been provided for the regeneration of Brentford, which is now well under way, and a grant of another £7.3 million has been announced just this week by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for the regeneration of Isleworth, in particular its Ivybridge estate. Both those sums are in addition to the normal annual grant from the Government. How ironic it is that, in a week when the Government announce a grant of over £7 million for Isleworth, we must have this debate.

It is worth noting that Hounslow has done better than most local authorities in recent years. Its SSA has increased by 39.6 per cent. since 1991, in comparison with average increases of 36.3 per cent. for outer-London boroughs, and 33.6 per cent. for local government as a whole. The Government have been extremely generous to Hounslow, giving us about 6 per cent. more than they have given other local authorities.

How appalling it is that, in the midst of that extra funding, Hounslow's Labour council proposes to close the Isleworth day care centre and the Chiswick families centre, both of which are much-used and much-needed local facilities. They provide invaluable support for vulnerable elderly people in Isleworth, and for families in Chiswick.

The campaign to keep both centres open has been led by, among others, Mrs. Josephine Langton, a Conservative councillor in Chiswick. However, they face total closure for the sake of a mere £235,000 a year in the case of the Isleworth day care centre, and just £35,000 a year in the case of the Chiswick families centre. Given that Hounslow will have a budget of over £200 million next year, it is utterly callous of its Labour council to attack—inhumanely, cold-bloodedly and ruthlessly—the most vulnerable of my constituents.

That is why I wanted to initiate this debate, and why I wrote to the leader of the Labour party last week asking him to exert pressure on his councillors in Hounslow. I drew attention to the SSA settlement and the huge funds available to the council, and I now wait to discover how the Labour leader will respond to my letter—a letter that asked him to intervene to protect the elderly and vulnerable in my patch.

I place on record my admiration for two Labour councillors, Vanessa Smith and Pat Nicholas, who represent Isleworth's south ward. They want to keep the centres open—as I do—but what has been the reward for their efforts? Suspension from the Labour party.

Suspension from the Labour party for protecting the elderly, the infirm and the vulnerable? Punishment for caring? What sort of Labour party is this? What kind of uncaring monsters appear to be running the Labour party in Hounslow? Despite the SSA settlement, the revenue support grant and the additional Government funds for social services—£190,000 more was provided this year than last year—they are not listening. They are going to shut down those two centres.

More than 80 per cent. of my surgery cases now constitute complaints about the way in which Hounslow council spends its money: about how it cares not for its tenants, cares not for the quality of its housing stock and cares not for the homeless, given that 400 council homes are still unoccupied. We all know that the SSA is divided into a number of components. Within Hounslow's total SSA, the SSA for social services has been increased, as I have said. It is more than enough to keep those two centres open, but only if—it is a big if—Hounslow council decides that it wants to.

That is the nub of the problem. Despite massive public pressure locally, and although some 2,500 people have signed petitions in support of keeping the centres open—despite the extra funding announced by the Government, and despite pressure from their own councillors—those who run Hounslow council still say that they must close the centres. The problem is that Hounslow's Labour

[Mr. Deva]

council is wasting money hand over fist and is refusing to make sensible savings. Every pound that is saved on administration could be diverted to front-line services.

In calculating the SSA, I am sure that the Minister has taken into account the protection of my most vulnerable constituents. I shall give two examples of how Hounslow council could have saved if it had wanted, these two centres within the SSA. First, the council accepted an in-house bid from its direct labour force for the removal of waste from the borough. That is an essential service, but, by refusing to accept the lowest bid and accepting instead the more expensive in-house higher bid, the council turned down savings of about £400,000 a year—more than enough to divert to the social services budget to keep the centres open. The council chose not to do that.

Even now, the council could take a simple action to keep the centres open. Councillor Paul Lynch, the excellent Conservative leader on Hounslow council, and Councillor Barbara Reed, the Conservative social services spokesman on the council, proposed at a council meeting that the authority's budget be altered to keep the two centres open. They were voted down by a huge Labour majority.

At the request of UNISON, the borough's trade union, Councillor Lynch also asked at the last council meeting for the council to institute a purchasing policy to effect savings. The council totally ignored that suggestion and swept it under the carpet. What a strange turn of events—a Conservative council group leader and a Conservative Member of this House supporting the trades unions and Labour councillors in seeking to maintain essential services for the most vulnerable people in my constituency.

At present, each council department orders its own stationery, office furniture, computers, photocopiers and even paper clips. I have asked how much the council spends on paper clips but no one knows. What a shambles! If the council instituted an overall purchasing policy it is estimated that an annual saving of £35,000 could be made on stationery alone.

That would be enough to keep the Chiswick families centre open, and if the same policy was followed for the council's office furniture, computers and photocopiers, it would be possible to generate savings of £235,000 a year, which would be enough to keep the Isleworth day care centre open. What is more important: office desks and chairs in the civic centre and super-duper photocopiers, or helping frail, infirm elderly people in Isleworth and young children at risk and their families in Chiswick?

Hounslow Labour council has discretion: there is huge leeway. Local councillors could have chosen to exercise that discretion, but they have not done so. If that is so-called new Labour, give us old Labour. Better still, we should let the people know that Hounslow's Labour council is closing two valuable local centres without just reason, to try to make a political point against the Government. It will not wash.

Just one tenth of 1 per cent. of the council's total budget would keep the centres open, and they are provided for within the SSA. They may not be important to the Labour party, but the services they provide are vital to my constituents, as the Government have demonstrated by their generosity in the SSA settlement.

If the council has an ounce of humanity, even at this late hour it will re-examine its priorities, amend its budget proposals, and acknowledge that it can keep the Isleworth and Chiswick centres open. I urge the council to do that, and I urge the Government to make it clear that, if those centres close, it will be due to the callous intransigence of Hounslow's Labour administration. It runs counter to the generous SSA settlement, and is against all common sense and humanity.

8.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. James Clappison): My hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Mr. Deva) has raised some important issues relating to the way in which the standard spending assessment applies to the London borough of Hounslow.

I am sure that my hon. Friend's constituents, and especially the elderly, the vulnerable and the infirm who depend on the Isleworth day care centre and the Chiswick families centre will take a great interest in what he has said. It is clear from what my hon. Friend said that those centres provide a valuable service to the community, and I am sure that those who benefit from them will have taken a special interest in his speech and in his clear plea on their behalf to Hounslow borough council.

My hon. Friend spoke about SSAs, and I should like to show how the Hounslow SSA fits into the overall system. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment outlined in a statement on 27 November our proposals for local government finance for the coming financial year. Local government accounts for about a quarter of general Government expenditure. It would be absurd to imagine that, within this large total, there is no room for greater efficiency. Therefore, I make no apology for the fact that we have pursued such efficiencies vigorously, but I can also assure the House that we have approached our assessment of what is needed to maintain key services with equal vigour.

We have provided for an increase in total standard spending of 2.5 per cent. on a like-for-like basis. In allocating this total between services, we have given priority to education, social services, the police, and the fire service. We have proposed capping arrangements which ensure that virtually all authorities can spend the whole of any increase in SSA on those services. These proposals represent a sound balance between the need to sustain local government services, the scope for increased efficiency, and the scale of public expenditure which the country can afford.

The mechanism by which the public expenditure proposals are translated into figures for individual authorities is the SSA. Standard spending assessments form the basis for the distribution of the revenue support grant. Standard spending assessments are the Government's assessment of the appropriate amount of revenue expenditure which would allow any authority to provide a standard level of service, consistent with our view of the appropriate amount of revenue expenditure for all authorities.

The calculation of an authority's SSA follows general principles applied equally to all authorities, taking account of each authority's demographic, geographic and social characteristics. Differences in SSAs between authorities with the same service responsibilities are thus due to differences in their underlying characteristics.

My hon. Friend and the residents of Hounslow will be interested to know where Hounslow stands within this system, which is designed to bring about overall fairness in the distribution of revenue support. My hon. Friend gave an interesting account of how Hounslow has fared in recent years. Standard spending assessments were introduced in 1990-91, since when Hounslow's SSA has gone up by 51 per cent. The SSAs for outer-London boroughs have gone up by 42 per cent. on average over the same period. For local authorities overall, SSAs are up by 39 per cent. I know that my hon. Friend will find that of great interest.

For 1997-98, Hounslow borough's provisional SSA has been increased at about the average rate for outer-London boroughs—a 2 per cent. increase compared with 1.9 per cent. for outer london as a whole. In terms of total SSA per head, Hounslow ranked fifth out of the 20 outer-London boroughs. This increase in SSA is more than reflected in the provisional cap limit for the borough, which has risen by 2.1 per cent. Budgets can rise by £3.95 million if the authority feels that that is necessary.

I hope that shows that increasing needs in Hounslow have been recognised by the Government and reflected in the SSA over several years and again for next year's local government finance settlement. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his wise words, which were founded upon his analysis of how Hounslow has fared and his judgment that it has been treated fairly with SSAs.

We have ensured that, among other things, by developing indicators to track spending needs. For instance, Hounslow has a relatively large ethnic minority population—extra costs arising from that are reflected in the measure of additional educational needs. As a London borough, Hounslow faces high employment costs—allowance is made in the area cost adjustment from which the borough benefits.

I drew attention to the priority that the Government were placing on education for next year. My hon. Friend will wish to underline to his authority the fact that Hounslow's education SSA has increased by 4.1 per cent., placing it sixth out of the 20 outer London boroughs on a per pupil basis.

Some concerns have been expressed about funding for personal social services. The year 1997-98 will be tight for social services funding. The average outer London borough faces an SSA reduction of 0.4 per cent. However, even in a difficult year, Hounslow's social services SSA has risen by 0.5 per cent., or £190,000. Hounslow also receives an extra £1.46 million for 1997-98 from the special transitional grant for community care. Such funding is appropriate in the light of my hon. Friend's comments about people with particular needs.

On asylum seekers, on 26 November, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced that local authorities will be reimbursed the reasonable costs that they incur in supporting adult asylum seekers. The exact details of the funding have yet to be finalised, but I assure my hon. Friend that other local services should not suffer. Separate funding arrangements have been made for children seeking asylum.

In the light of the important conclusions that my hon. Friend has drawn, I hope that that factual account of Hounslow's SSA, how it has risen and been dealt with this year, and how it compares with those of other authorities in this and other years, is of interest to him. I agree with him that the settlement for Hounslow is fair. The authority still has considerable discretion within a budget of more than £190 million to allocate resources on what it considers to be its priorities. If Hounslow uses its resources well and pursues efficiencies vigorously, there is no reason why it should not provide good-quality local services without excessive increases in local taxes.

Returning to my hon. Friend's main point about how Hounslow chooses to spend its funds, I believe that its decisions are matters for Hounslow borough council, but I am sure that it and my hon. Friend's constituents and Hounslow residents will have listened with great interest to his powerful plea.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes past Eight o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 9 December 1996

HOME DEPARTMENT

Offences (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been arrested since 9 February, and are awaiting trial in Great Britain for offences which can be regarded as related to the situation in Northern Ireland. [6746]

Mr. Howard: Fourteen.

Security Service

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the arrangements for co-ordinating the activities of the Security Service with those of police forces and other law enforcement agencies under section 1(2) of the Security Service Act 1989. [7171]

Mr. Howard: The arrangements, which were agreed between the Director General of the Security Service and the Director General of the National Criminal Intelligence Service, who was designated for this purpose, are set out in the annex to Home Office circular 46/1996 addressed to chief officers of police and others about the Security Service Act 1996. A copy of the circular is being placed in the Library.

Publicity

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what promotional and public information campaigns his Department is *(a)* currently running and *(b)* planning to run during the next six months; and for each campaign (i) how much it will cost, (1) in total and (2) to his Department, (ii) what agencies or bodies are undertaking the work and (iii) what is its planned duration. [7416]

Mr. Howard: My Department is currently running a campaign about the illegal carrying and use of knives. An information pack containing posters and background material has been sent to all schools and further education colleges in England and Wales, police crime prevention officers—CPOs—and local newspapers. A pre-recorded radio interview was sent to 110 local radio stations. Head teachers and college principals have been invited to display the posters and to consider using the support material in student project work. CPOs will invite local retailers and others to display the posters, and will work with local media to stimulate further cover.

It is not possible to state an exact duration for the campaign because it does not use booked advertising space. Free site posters are displayed for varying lengths of time, but my Department's experience is that this can in some cases extend to several months. The total cost of the campaign is £24,265. My Department funded the £20,289 production costs and the Department for Education and Employment and the Welsh Office spent between them £3,976 on distribution. Euro RSCG WNEK Gosper carried out studio work for the poster and the Central Office of Information produced and distributed the radio tape.

My Department plans to run two campaigns between January and February next year. These are:

Fire Safety

A television commercial to encourage the installation and maintenance of domestic smoke detectors: from 1 to 14 January. The total cost is £420,000, all to my Department. The advertising agency is Euro RSCG WNEK Gosper and media buying is undertaken by the Central Office of Information.

Special Constabulary Recruitment

Television and local press and radio advertising to encourage volunteers: from 13 January to 8 February 1997. Total projected cost is £855,000, subject to variance of about £20,000, depending on the number of respondents requesting further information. The advertising agency is Leagas Shafron Davis and media buying is carried out by the Central Office of Information.

A third campaign will run from approximately 24 to 72 hours after the announcement of the date of the next general election, depending on the period of notice given. It is designed to advise the public of absent voters' rights. The budget will depend on media mix and costs of media space at the time, but is forecast to be in the range of £457,000 to £687,000. All costs will fall to the Home Office. Duration is also dependent on the media mix, but will be no longer than three days. Electoral registration officers will carry out supporting activity to inform voters of their rights. The advertising agency is Euro RSCG WNEK Gosper, with media buying handled by the Central Office of Information.

None of the three campaigns uses promotions.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department has spent on promotional or public information campaigns in each of the last five years; and how much he estimates will be spent on these campaigns during the (i) current and (ii) next financial years. [7545]

Mr. Howard: My Department's spending on public information campaigns in each of the past five years and planned expenditure for the current year is set out in the table.

Plans for publicity expenditure for 1997–98 have not yet been finalised and it is therefore not possible to provide estimates.

Year	*Advertising (£)*	*Other information material and services*
1991–92 Total	7,275,940	3,600,288
1992–93 Total	7,344,635	5,638,982
1993–94 Total	9,090,222	5,062,327

Year	Advertising (£)	Other information material and services
1994–95 Total	10,912,000	3,190,358
1995–96 Total	7,609,227	3,179,882
1996–97 forecast total	5,537,000	3,317,000

Prisons

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the chief executive of the Prison Service to discuss availability of prison places; and if he will make a statement. [7905]

Mr. Howard: I have regular meetings with the Director General of the Prison Service covering a wide range of issues. The availability of prison places is one of those issues.

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of *(a)* 10-year-olds, *(b)* 11-year-olds, *(c)* 12-year-olds, *(d)* 13-year-olds, *(e)* 14-year-olds, *(f)* 15-year-olds and *(g)* 16-year-olds who were found guilty of offences (i) in each of the last 12 months and (ii) in total which would have made them eligible for electronic tagging under the new proposals; and if he will make a statement. [7503]

Mr. Sackville: Information on 10 to 16-year-olds found guilty of all offences in 1995 is given in the table. Information for 1996 will be available in the autumn of 1997.

It is proposed that a curfew order, with electronic monitoring, will be available to the courts for use with juvenile offenders under the age of 16 convicted of any offence subject to the restrictions set out in section 6 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991. It will be for courts to decide whether to apply such an order in any particular case. It will be available initially on a pilot basis.

Persons aged 10 to 16 convicted at all courts by age and month, 1995
England and Wales, all types of offence

Age	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	All aged 10 to 16
January	16	37	100	291	666	1,093	1,464	3,667
February	4	33	97	293	631	1,078	1,464	3,600
March	9	28	118	279	707	1,184	1,601	3,926
April	1	31	78	200	491	875	1,280	2,956
May	4	40	92	224	586	1,010	1,414	3,370
June	4	35	107	258	611	1,073	1,431	3,519
July	4	26	75	235	564	1,015	1,488	3,407
August	2	27	81	231	566	1,076	1,490	3,473
September	3	29	85	245	520	909	1,371	3,162
October	3	34	75	257	609	1,085	1,519	3,582
November	7	19	99	233	590	1,154	1,569	3,671
December	8	23	82	164	443	824	1,244	2,788
Total	65	362	1,089	2,910	6,984	12,376	17,335	41,121

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the results of pilot schemes on the electronic tagging of adults; and if he will include a statistical breakdown of the results. [7504]

Mr. Sackville: The report of the Home Office's evaluation of the first year of trials of electronic monitoring is due to be published later this month. It will include the relevant statistics.

Chahal Case

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if compensation is to be paid to those released from prison arising form the Chahal case. [8120]

Mr. Howard: No.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Chahal [8121]

Mr. Howard: I have reviewed the cases affected by the judgment. I am considering what changes we might make to our appeals system to comply with the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights.

Caddy Inquiry

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the names of the 14 cases, representatives of which have received notification that they are being reviewed as part of Professor Caddy's inquiry; and in which cases Mr. Ian Feraday was a Crown witness. [7229]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 4 December 1996]:* The representatives of the following individuals were advised that their cases would be examined by Professor Caddy as part of his inquiry.

James Canning
Derek Donerty
Robert Fryers
Patrick Hayes
Hugh Jack
Denis Kinsella

John Kinsella

Ethel Lamb (deceased)

Pairic MacFhloinn

Sean McNulty

Gerard Mackin

Nicholas Mullen

Jan Taylor

Vincent Wood.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General will write to the hon. Member in relation to those cases in which Mr. Alan Feraday was a Crown witness.

Judicial Reviews

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many, and in respect of which judicial review application, his Department has been deemed to have acted illegally since May 1993. [7313]

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 4 December 1996]:* Since May 1993, the Home Office has been involved in several thousand judicial review applications. It has been successful in over 90 per cent. of them. The detailed information requested is not readily available.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she will publish a Government position paper on higher level vocational qualifications; and if she will make a statement. [8633]

Mr. Paice: A document which sets out the Government's current position on this matter is being published today. Copies are being placed in the Library. The document "Higher Level Vocational Qualifications—A Government Position Paper" invites those who have an interest in higher level vocational qualifications, in particular professional bodies and higher education institutions, to engage with the Department for Education and Employment, the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) and the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC) to bring all vocational qualifications into the national qualifications framework.

Education and Training (Teenagers)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to improve education and training for 14 to 19-year-olds. [8634]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have today published a White Paper, "Learning to Compete: education and training for 14–19 year olds" (SO Cm 3486).

"Learning to Compete" builds on the Government's achievements over the past decade in increasing choice, participation and attainment by young people in education and training in England. It sets out the Government's vision for first-class education and training for the next century, based on the entitlement of all young people to learning, on the need for employability, and on the value of effective partnerships at national, regional and local level. It is designed to renew our drive towards the national targets for education and training, helping young people to play their part in a successful society, and Britain to strengthen its international competitiveness.

The White Paper draws on extensive and invaluable consultations over the past year, in particular on the conclusions of Sir Ron Dearing's review of 16 to 19 qualifications. It proposes a wide-ranging programme of action for the Government and their key partners to improve young people's learning further, and to ensure their successful transition to employment and further learning throughout life. In particular, the White Paper:

- introduces from September 1997 a new learning credits entitlement for all young people aged 14 to 21 to career planning and learning opportunities up to level 3. This will improve young people's participation and attainment and encourage them to value their learning more. The Government have also published today a consultation document, "A Passport to Learning", on the detailed implementation of learning credits;
- enhances the breadth and rigour of the qualifications framework at key stage 4 and beyond, in particular by making part 1 GNVQs available from September 1998 to all schools who wish to provide them, strengthening GCE A-levels, GNVQs and NVQs, and promoting key skills throughout education and training;
- acts to make education for 14 to 19-year-olds more relevant to the world of work, by supporting innovative approaches to vocational study by 14 to 16-year-olds, introducing a new national record of achievement and encouraging more effective use of labour market information in making choices at 16;
- introduces a relaunch strategy—a new start for young people—to bring disaffected 14 to 19 year-olds back into learning with partnership projects at local level;
- introduces from September 1997 national traineeships to help 16 to 19-year-olds reach NVQ level 2 and acquire key skills with employers, taking forward the successful approach of modern apprenticeships;
- develops common principles to underpin the effective internal and external quality assurance of all 16 to 19 learning, including the introduction of an external inspection regime for work-based training providers and more consistent measures of performance;
- takes forward the application of common principles to the funding of learning in schools, colleges and work-based training, supporting good recruitment practice and effective teaching and training and rewarding successful achievement, in order to enhance choice, cost-effectiveness and fair competition; and
- introduces new funding arrangements from 1997–88 for training for young people, which are consistent with these principles and designed to reduce bureaucracy for training and enterprise councils and their providers.

This programme of action demonstrates the enhanced capacity of my Department to make coherent policy in this key area. It will be supported by the expenditure plans for my Department set out in the Budget. The Government will work closely with their key partners and with providers to take it forward successfully.

Copies of the White Paper and the learning credits consultation document have been placed in the Library.

GCSE Scores

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each year since 1991, for all English secondary schools, on the same basis as her Department's annual school performance tables, the average GCSE point scores, in five percentile groups ranked by their 15-year-olds achievements. [6406]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 28 November 1996]:* The following list for 1996 shows the average GCSE point scores, in 5 per centile groups, ranked by their 15-year-old pupils' achievements. The figures are based on the school performance tables published in November and exclude data from the published schools that had fewer than 10 pupils aged 15. The averages quoted are simple averages, based on the sums of the percentages divided by the number of schools involved. Data for earlier years have been provided on a slightly different basis from those given in the reply to the hon. Member's questions of 7 November and 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *960* and *1034* respectively.

School performance tables 1996
Percentage of 15-year-olds achieving

5 percentile group	*Average point score*[1]	*5 A* to C (per cent.)*	*5 A* to G (per cent.)*	*1 A* to G (per cent.)*	*Number schools*
1	60.8	98.8	99.4	99.6	218
2	55.8	93.6	97.1	98.1	219
3	50.1	83.5	92.2	95.1	218
4	45.0	70.3	93.5	95.9	219
5	42.8	62.1	93.8	96.3	218
6	41.5	57.2	93.7	96.5	219
7	40.0	53.3	93.6	96.6	218
8	38.5	49.5	92.4	96.2	219
9	36.9	46.3	91.2	95.8	218
10	35.6	42.9	90.6	95.3	219
11	34.1	39.7	89.1	94.5	218
12	32.3	36.1	86.3	93.3	218
13	30.6	32.6	85.5	92.6	219
14	29.1	28.9	84.0	92.0	218
15	27.2	25.0	81.4	90.6	219
16	24.9	21.0	77.4	88.1	218
17	22.3	16.0	73.4	86.1	219
18	14.9	6.5	52.6	76.8	218
19	1.3	0.0	0.0	27.1	219
20	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	218

[1] The average point score has been calculated by using A*=8, A=7, B=6, C=5, D=4, E=3, F=2 and G=1.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what proportion of consultees who responded to the section on extending the freedom of grant-maintained schools in the White Paper, "Self-Government for Schools" were in favour of the proposed extensions. [6925]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 28 November 1996]:* We received 637 responses to the White Paper "Self-Government for Schools". More than three quarters were from LEAs and LEA-maintained schools. Less than 2 per cent. were from GM bodies and GM schools. The table gives the information requested.

Proposal	*Number of responses commenting on the relevant proposal*	*Number and percentage in favour*
To remove the requirement for GM schools to publish statutory proposals to:		
(a) open or close a nursery	176	7 (4)
(b) open or close a sixth form	195	6 (3)
(c) add or remove boarding provision	152	5 (3)
(d) expand their capacity by up to 50 per cent.	188	5 (3)

Education Expenditure

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will publish a breakdown of *(a)* the £830 million available for education in 1997–98, according to the statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, *(b)* the £875 million quoted in the departmental press release and *(c)* the £633 million available for local education authorities, showing how the above figures are intended to be spent. [7470]

Mr. Robin Squire: The £875 million is the increase in provision for schools, colleges and universities between 1996–97, after adjusting for in-year changes, and 1997–98. Of this, £830 million relates to schools. The £633 million is the increase in local authority education standard spending—total education standard spending assessments plus recurrent specific grants to local authorities related to education—as announced by

my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment in his statement to the House on the local authority financial settlement on 27 November 1996.

The breakdown of the £875 million increase is shown in the table:

Increase in:	*£ million*
Education standard spending assessments[1]	591
New money for the nursery voucher scheme	129
Assisted places scheme	22
GEST	22
GM recurrent	15
OFSTED	13
Schools capital[2]	9
Specialist schools[3]	7
Other smaller items[4]	22
Sub total—schools	830
Further and higher education institutions	45
Total	875

[1] After adjustments for changes in function and funding, in particular the national introduction of the nursery voucher scheme
[2] After allowing for contribution to LA challenge
[3] Includes an increase in capital provision of £3 million
[4] Including additional resources for ethnic minorities (section 11 grant), teacher training, changes to key stage 2/3 tests, the music and ballet scheme and literacy and numeracy centres.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when, by what mechanism and to which local authorities the £50 million in capital allowances announced in the Budget statement will be distributed. [7471]

Mrs. Gillan: I expect to make an announcement about the distribution of credit approvals to local education authorities and of grant to governors of voluntary-aided schools for 1997–98, including amounts over and above the previously announced baselines, later this month. A copy of the Department's letter setting out the basis on which these distributions will be made has been placed in the Library. Further support is also available through the specialist schools programme. The distribution of grant to the governors of grant-maintained schools is a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools.

Publicity

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much her Department has spent on promotional or public information campaigns in each of the last five years; and how much she estimates will be spent on these campaigns during the (i) current and (ii) next financial years. [7542]

Mr. Robin Squire: Total spending on advertising and publicity for the Department is as follows in financial years. Before the merger in July 1995, the Department operated separately funded programmes of publicity. This continued until the end of the financial year 1995–96.

Department for Education:

1991–92: £9.0 million
1992–93: £8.0 million
1993–94: £10.1 million
1994–95: £9.4 million
1995–96: £5.4 million.

Department of Employment:

1991–92: £18.3 million
1992–93: £7.2 million
1993–94: £11.1 million
1994–95: £11.1 million
1995–96: £11.0 million.

Current estimated spending for the Department for 1996–97 is £17.3 million. The budget for the next financial year is still under discussion, but is provisionally estimated as some £12.5 million.

Personal Services Industry

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what is her policy in respect of the continuing payment of jobseeker's allowance to people who have refused to take a job in the personal services industry; [7993]

(2) if she will include in the next set of jobseeker's regulations an explicit provision that no jobseeker should have his or her benefit refused or reduced for refusing to take a job in the personal services industry. [7994]

Mr. Forth: I am satisfied that the legislation on refusal of employment already contains adequate safeguards. First a sanction can be imposed only when the opportunity of employment was notified to the jobseeker by a jobcentre adviser. Advisers will not suggest that people should apply for jobs that are obviously inappropriate, and Employment Service guidance is currently being strengthened to ensure that jobseekers are not submitted to undesirable or inappropriate vacancies. Secondly, no sanction is imposed if a jobseeker had good cause for refusing or failing to apply for an opportunity. Adjudication officers should take any relevant matter into account in deciding whether good cause was shown. Where appropriate, this must include the fact that the jobseeker refused the opportunity because of a sincerely held conscientious objection to the work concerned.

Education and Community Values

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what criterion was used by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority in determining who should receive the questionnaire with the consultation document in the consultation exercise on values in eduction and the community; and if she will make a statement. [8098]

Mrs. Gillan: The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority—SCAA—issued two separate questionnaires: one to a random sample of schools; the other to some 700 national and local organisations on SCAA's general mailing list. The questionnaires were designed simply to distinguish replies from these two samples. An independent research organisation is analysing the results. The consultation document remains available, although the consultation period ended on 29 November. SCAA will take account of all representations and will publish an analysis.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how much money was raised by local education authorities in each year since

1992 *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in the west midlands and *(c)* in Coventry; and what was the percentage change from the previous year in each case; [7698]

(2) how much local education authorities are required to raise themselves for the years 1996 and 1997 *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in the west midlands and *(c)* in Coventry; and what is the percentage change from the previous year in each case. [7699]

Mr. Robin Squire: Local authorities have discretion in setting council taxes. The revenue income of local education authorities between 1993–94 and 1996–97 has come primarily from the following sources: the authority's entitlements to revenue support grant and other special and specific grants; the authority's share of the amounts distributed from the non-domestic rates pool; council taxes raised by the authority itself, or by the relevant billing authorities in the case of county councils; and any revenue raised from sales, fees and charges, which in turn depend on the range of functions carried out by the authority. The table shows the council taxes calculated by local education authorities to support their revenue expenditure each year from 1993–94.

It is not possible to provide a comparable figure for 1992–93, as arrangements for raising taxes were different under the community charge system. The figures for English local education authorities are not comparable with those for west midlands and Coventry city council because the England figures include shire counties and inner-London boroughs, which are responsible for a different range of services from other education authorities. Figures for 1997–98 will not be available until authorities have set their budgets in 1997.

Council taxes 1993–94 to 1996–97

	1993–94 £ million	*1994–95 £ million*	*Increase on previous year Per cent.*	*1995–96 £ million*	*Increase on previous year Per cent.*	*1996–97 £ million*	*Increase on previous year Per cent.*
England	7,367.0	7,709.0	4.7	7,999.0	n/a	8,630.0	7.9
West midlands	401.0	401.0	0.1	432.0	7.8	471.0	8.9
Coventry	51.1	56.8	11.2	60.1	5.8	61.7	2.6

The figure for English local education authorities for 1995–96 is not comparable with 1994–95 because police services were transferred from shire counties to police authorities on 1 April 1995.

School Funding

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how much money her Department provided for schools in each year since 1992 *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in the west midlands and *(c)* in Coventry; and what was the percentage change from the previous year in each case; [7697]

(2) how much money will be provided to schools for the years 1996 and 1997 *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in the west midlands and *(c)* in Coventry; and what is the percentage change from the previous year in each case; [7700]

Mr. Robin Squire: The great bulk of money is provided by local education authorities. Since central Government support to local authorities is not hypothecated, it is not possible to say how much of this support has been deployed for schools. Central Government plan financial provision for local authorities on the basis of standard spending assessments. The table sets out the education standard spending assessments between 1992–93 and 1997–98, but local education authorities are free to decide how much to spend on schools and other services in allocating their overall budgets. Because of changes in local authority functions, such as the loss of responsibility for most further education in 1993–94, the reform of inter-authority recoupment in 1995–96, and the arrangements for nursery vouchers in 1997–98, the cash figures are not comparable year-by-year. The tables therefore show *(a)* the unadjusted education SSAs for Coventry, the west midlands and England from 1992–93 to 1997–98 and *(b)* the underlying percentage changes after local authority changes of function have been taken into account.

(a) Education SSAs

SSA £ million

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*[1]
Coventry	122.987	111.417	113.295	115.727	119.872	119.759
West Midlands	1,132.269	1,023.929	1,019.255	1,024.585	1,072.402	1,065.994
England	18,352.700	16,530.700	16,826.000	17,024.100	17,764.24	17,838.306

[1] 1997–98 figures are provisional.

(b) Underlying percentage changes over the previous year

	1992–93	*1993–94 Percentage change*	*1994–95 Percentage change*	*1995–96 Percentage change*	*1996–97 Percentage change*	*1997–98*[1] *Percentage change*
Coventry	7.4	1.7	2.6	2.0	3.6	3.3
West Midlands	6.2	2.7	0.4	0.4	4.7	3.0
England	7.1	2.9	2.7	1.2	4.4	3.4

[1] 1997–98 figures are provisional.

Feversham College, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to receive an application by Feversham college in Bradford for voluntary aided status; when she refused an earlier application; what were the main grounds for refusal; what contacts there have been since that refusal between her officials, representatives of the college and representatives of Bradford local education authority about the latest application; when she expects to announce a decision on the latest application; and if she will make a statement. [8005]

Mr. Robin Squire: A previous application from the college was rejected last year, but my right hon. Friend indicated that she was ready to consider a fresh application. For the reasons for rejection, I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him of 23 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *294*. I understand that consultation is under way in Bradford on a possible new application from Feversham college for voluntary aided status. The officials met representatives of the promoters and Bradford LEA on 15 May 1996 and have kept closely in touch since then. We have made it clear that we are willing to offer such advice and help as we can. If the promoters decide to publish fresh proposals, these will come to my right hon. Friend for decision and will be considered on their merits.

Museums and Galleries

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list those museums and galleries which form part of universities in the United Kingdom and for which they have financial responsibility, direct or indirect, indicating the location, date of foundation, nature of governing body or bodies, name of the director, number of permanent staff, total annual running cost, number of visitor admissions per year, and any admission charge made, at the most recent convenient date. [8078]

Mr. Forth: The Higher Education Funding Council for England—HEFC—provides financial support for 23 museums, galleries and collections at 13 universities. In addition, it provides financial support for earth sciences collections at four of these institutions. The table lists the higher education museums, galleries and collections that receive support.

"The Museums Yearbook", published by the Museums Association gives details of location, date of foundation, nature of governing body, name of director, permanent staff, number of visitor admissions each year and admission charge made for museums and galleries across the UK. It is available in the Library. Details of the annual running costs are held by individual museums and galleries.

Higher education museums, galleries and collections receiving HEFCE non-formula funding 1996–97

Museum, gallery or collection	*Higher education institution*
Holburne Museum and Crafts Study Centre	University of Bath
Barber Institute of Fine Art	University of Birmingham
Earth Sciences Collection	University of Birmingham
Fitzwilliam Museum	University of Cambridge
Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology	University of Cambridge
Whipple Museum of the History of Science	University of Cambridge
Earth Sciences Collection	University of Cambridge
Oriental Museum	University of Durham
Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts	University of East Anglia
University of Leeds Art Collections and Gallery	University of Leeds
Courtauld Institute Galleries	University of London
SOAS—Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art	University of London
Witt and Conway Photographic Collection	University of London
College Art Collection	University College London
Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology	University College London
Manchester Museum	University of Manchester
Whitworth Art Gallery	University of Manchester
Earth Sciences Collection	University of Manchester
Silver Studio Collection	University of Middlesex
Museum of Antiquities	University of Newcastle upon Tyne
Hancock Museum	University of Newcastle upon Tyne
Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology	University of Oxford
Pitt Rivers Museum	University of Oxford
Museum of the History of Science	University of Oxford
Oxford University Museum (Scientific Collections)	University of Oxford
Earth Sciences Collection	University of Oxford
Museum of English Rural Life	University of Reading

Free School Meals

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will update her answer of 11 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *536–38*, indicating the number of children in receipt of free school meals, by region, in each of the last five years. [8184]

Mrs. Gillan: Information on the take-up of free school meals in maintained schools in England in the years 1992 to 1996 is shown in the table.

Pupils taking free school meals in maintained nursery, primary, secondary and special schools by region in England 1991 to 1996

Position in January each year

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
North	88,703	95,102	99,500	101,456	100,589
North West	191,052	207,690	217,154	218,516	226,072
East Anglia	27,657	33,369	35,868	36,607	37,019
Yorkshire and Humberside	120,243	130,571	136,066	137,382	140,239
West Midlands	133,311	148,944	155,509	154,062	154,677
East Anglia	68,415	78,212	83,624	85,763	86,604
Greater London	169,787	196,965	219,229	230,650	241,705
Other South East	134,528	167,783	184,492	185,469	186,062
South West	68,272	82,690	85,684	84,932	87,459
England	1,001,968	1,141,326	1,217,126	1,234,837	1,260,426

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Overnight Accommodation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he will list the locations of the space set aside for overnight accommodation; what facilities are provided; what was the number of times the facilities have been used in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [8299]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: This is a matter for the Serjeant at Arms. I have asked him to write to my hon. Friend.

DEFENCE

Cyprus

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the units of British forces in Cyprus, indicating their combat capability. [7658]

Mr. Soames: The units of British Forces Cyprus are as listed. All are assessed as achieving a satisfactory level of combat capability.

Headquarters British Forces Cyprus
Headquarters Episkopi Garrison
Headquarters Dhekelia Garrison
62 Support Squadron Royal Engineers
9 Signal Regiment
259 Signal Squadron Royal Signals
1st Battalion The Royal Gloucestershire Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment
1st Battalion The Kings Regiment
16 Flight Army Air Corps
Cyprus Logistic Unit
The Princess Mary's Hospital
Episkopi Garrison Medical Centre
Medical Reception Centre Dhekelia Garrison
RAF Akrotiri Medical Centre
Joint Services Health Unit
Cyprus Engineering Unit
Dhekelia Garrison Workshop
Command Pay Office
Headquarters Education and Training Services
54 Army Education Centre
55 Army Education Centre
Cyprus Defence Animals Support Unit
Royal Military Police Cyprus
11 Dental Group
Cyprus Joint Security Unit
Cyprus Joint Services Adventure Training Centre
Troodos Station
RAF Akrotiri
12 Signals Unit RAF
33 Signals Unit RAF
84 Squadron RAF
Provost and Security Services Cyprus
Defence Fire Service
Security Force Police.

Mr. McShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent contacts he has had with representatives of the Greek Cypriot Government in London. [7669]

Mr. Soames: During the course of this year, the Secretary of State for Defence has had discussions in London with President Glavkos Clerides, Foreign Minister Michaelides, and High Commissioner Markides.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what overseas visits he has made in an official capacity since June. [7670]

Mr. Soames: Since 1 June 1996, the Secretary of State for Defence has visited the following countries in his official capacity:

Australia
Belgium
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Bulgaria
Croatia
Denmark
France
Indonesia
Kuwait
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Malaysia
Norway
Oman
Poland
Qatar
Romania
Russia
Singapore
Slovenia
United Arab Emirates
USA.

RAF Logistics Support Service

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about defence agency status for the Royal Air Force Logistics Support Service. [8296]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The RAF Logistic Support Services will become an agency from 9 December 1996.

The agency will provide a comprehensive logistic service to a range of customers including all three services, the procurement executive and the aerospace industry. This will include policy advice; the introduction to service and in-service support of aircraft and associated equipments; logistics consultancy and information technology services. The agency will employ approximately 1,100 staff, comprising RN and RAF personnel and civil servants.

The first chief executive will be Air Commodore Ian Sloss who will be afforded the powers, responsibility and flexibility to build on the current organisation's expertise and high performance standards. The chief executive will

be directly accountable to the Secretary of State for Defence and to Parliament for the conduct and performance of the agency.

The agency has been set the following key targets for the first year of operation:

(1) To produce 95 per cent. of task reports, within aerospace maintenance development and support and information date management, by the target dates agreed with the sponsor and to acceptable quality.

(2) To evaluate 95 per cent. of all tasks within 25 days of receipt of the initial tasking documentation.

(3) The logistics computer centre will process 95 per cent. of all business system changes within the timescale agreed with the originator of the request and to acceptable quality.

(4) To develop a task and resource accounting management system—TRAMS—by 31 March 1997 to measure the delivery of logistics support service in peace and for operations as specified by the customer.

(5) To implement TRAMS across the agency by 31 March 1998.

(6) To establish baseline management metrics by 31 March 1998.

(7) To implement a personnel strategy plan from 31 March 1997 and to achieve accreditation to Investors in People by 31 March 1998.

(8) To meet an efficiency target of 3 per cent. for the financial year 1996/97.

(9) To meet a proposed efficiency target of 3 per cent. for the financial year 1997–98.

(10) To undertake, starting in April 1997, the British Quality Foundations' business excellence model self-assessment and to have a numerical assessment upon which to base future high level benchmarking exercises by November 1997.

(11) To achieve BS EN ISO 9001:1994 certification for all departments outstanding by 31 March 1997; and to maintain BS EN ISO 9001: 1994 certification for those departments already certified for the period 1997–98.

Copies of the agency's framework document and corporate plan will be placed in the Library of the House.

Combined Arms Tactical Trainer

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the Army's requirement for a combined arms tactical trainer. [8449]

Mr. Arbuthnot: A contract has been awarded to Lockheed-Martin Information Systems for two combined arms tactical trainers—CATT—to meet the Army's requirement for a new training simulation system. Lockheed-Martin was selected as the prime contractor following a full evaluation of the procurement options. The company has gained considerable experience of such systems through its development of the US Army's close combat tactical trainer. The contract, supported by a memorandum of understanding between my Department and the US Department of Defence, provides for substantial UK industrial involvement in high-quality work. GEC Marconi has been selected by Lockheed-Martin as its lead United Kingdom partner. It is planned that the British company will take over as prime contractor from 2003. The award of the CATT contract will initially sustain or create about 90 jobs mainly at GEC Marconi at Donnibristle, Fife. Further jobs will be created in the United Kingdom when CATT enters its production phase.

Discharged Personnel (Allergies)

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel have been medically discharged in each of the past 10 years because of allergic reactions. [6630]

Mr. Soames: This answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Low Flying

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the United States and Canadian Governments concerning low flying; and if he will make a statement. [7591]

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend has not recently discussed military low flying with representatives of the United States and Canadian Governments. My officials, however, have regular discussions with their counterparts from these countries on a wide range of topics including low flying.

Proposed Force Reductions

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the scale of the proposed reduction in the size of *(a)* the Army, including the Gurkhas but excluding the Royal Irish Regiment, *(b)* the RAF and *(c)* the Royal Navy between (i) 1 April 1990 and 1 April 1999 and (ii) 1 April 1992 and 1 April 1999, under the Government's current plans; and if he will make a statement. [7590]

Mr. Soames: The total strength, trained and untrained, of the armed forces, including Gurkhas and other locally employed personnel, on 1 April 1990 and 1 April 1992 was:

	RN	*Army*	*RAF*
1990	63,500	161,500	89,700
1992	62,400	154,100	86,000

Under current plans, the total intended strength of the armed forces, inclusive of LEPs, on 1 April 1999 will be:

RN	*Army*	*RAF*
44,000	115,000	55,500

Army Strength

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total trained strength of the British Army at *(a)* 1 April 1990 and *(b)* 1 April 1992, including the Gurkhas but not including the Royal Irish Regiment. [7589]

Mr. Soames: The trained strength of the British Army including Gurkhas but excluding the Ulster Defence Regiment and locally employed personnel was 144,800 at 1 April 1990 and 140,800 at 1 April 1992.

PRIME MINISTER

IRA

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Prime Minister on what occasions, and through what arrangement he or his office has had communications with the IRA since 1 September 1994. [7199]

The Prime Minister: None.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list by Department each occasion when Her Majesty's Government have entered a scrutiny reserve at Council of Minsters meetings, indicating the matter concerned.[7531]

The Prime Minister: Arrangements exist to prevent items coming forward for decision in the Council of Ministers where a member state's parliamentary scrutiny procedures have yet to be completed. The presidency may, nonetheless, occasionally place an item on a Council agenda for decision which is still subject to parliamentary scrutiny in a member state. Information on the occasions when the United Kingdom has as a consequence maintained a scrutiny reserve at the Council of Ministers is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Correspondence

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library *(a)* a copy of the letter recently sent to him by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume); and *(b)* any documents which accompanied the letter or his reply. [7818]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* It is not my practice to reveal correspondence, either letters or accompanying documents, which are sent to me in confidence. As for my reply to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) on 28 November, *Official Report*, columns *460–61*.

President Mary Robinson

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Prime Minister if the present visit to Great Britain by President Mary Robinson is an official visit. [7817]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* No.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the oil-for-food deal between Iraq and the United Nations agreed in August to be implemented; and if he will make a statement. [7523]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: UN Security Council resolution 986 (1995) will come into operation when the UN Secretary-General believes that conditions for its effective implementation have been met. We believe that it might be as early as this week.

West Indies Guardship

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made this year to countries in south America and the Caribbean about the anti-drug work of the West Indies guardship, its access to territorial waters and its powers to board vessels registered in these countries; and if he will make a statement. [7950]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We have made no such representations regarding the West Indies guardship—WIGS. I have, however, made representations to the Venezuelan Government, following the refusal by the Venezuelan authorities to grant permission to the Royal Fleet Auxillary Gold Rover, which operates in support of WIGS, for US law enforcement officers embarked on the RFA to board a Venezuelan flagged vessel suspected of drug trafficking. I made clear this Government's view that article 17 of the 1988 UN drugs convention, which the United Kingdom and Venezuela have ratified, provides the legal framework for maritime anti-narcotics co-operation.

French Fishermen (Minquies)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with EU Ministers in respect of rescinding the concessions granted to French fishermen to fish in the Minquies. [7791]

Dr. Liam Fox: None.

Afghanistan (National Museum)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the unauthorised sale of items formerly held by the national museum of Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [8015]

Dr. Liam Fox: We have received no such representations in recent years about the unauthorised sale of items formerly held by the national museum of Afghanistan. However, we regard the preservation of Afghanistan's cultural heritage as important.

European Union (Government Policy)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to promote Government policy in support of the European Union. [6507]

Mr. David Davis: The Government are tireless in promoting their European policy in the House and in public. Their overall position was set out in a White Paper, "A Partnership of Nations", earlier this year.

Bosnia–Herzegovina

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what resources have been allocated to clear land mines in Bosnia–Herzegovina. [6526]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The UK has contributed £428,000, including our share of EU assistance, to humanitarian mine clearance work in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We also seconded military personnel to assist in the establishment of the UN mine action centre in Sarajevo.

High Commission Official (Bradford Visit)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by whom a senior official at the British high commission in Islamabad was recently invited to visit Bradford; what was the purpose of the visit; if he will list those with whom the official had meetings; and if he will make a statement. [8004]

Dr. Liam Fox: No official of the British high commission has recently visited Bradford. An official from this Department called on councillors, community centres and the Bradford racial equality council in August as part of his preparation for taking up a post in Islamabad.

Government Communications Headquarters, Cheltenham

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to relocate which operational facilities from GCHQ Cheltenham; and to where. [7756]

Mr. Rifkind: None. However, GCHQ is currently undertaking a study into its requirements for future accommodation and related services. This study includes consideration of whether those requirements can be satisfied through the private finance initiative, and will include investigation of the possibility of collocating all the work currently carried out on the two Cheltenham sites.

EU General Affairs Council

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what matters were discussed at the European Union General Affairs Council on 25 November; and what decisions were taken. [8188]

Mr. David Davis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 29 November to my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes), *Official Report*, columns *461–63*.

Child Labour

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the report "Helping Business to Help Stop Child Labour", produced by Anti-Slavery International; and what guidelines are provided to British Government employees working in, or visiting, foreign countries, with regard to the employment and treatment of children. [7246]

Mr. Nelson: I have been asked to reply.

It is Government policy that wherever British missions and British officials overseas employ local staff, it is done in complete accordance with local law.

SCOTLAND

Local Government Finance

Mr. George Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list by authority and service area the recorded deficits made by local authority direct labour or services organisations in Scotland that have failed to meet the rate of return requirements operating under the terms of the Local Government (Planning and Land) Act 1980 and the Local Government Act 1988 for the financial year 1994–95 in both cash and constant prices; [7140]

(2) if he will list, by authority and service area, the surplus achieved on trading accounts by local authorities' direct labour or services organisations in Scotland for those services covered under the terms of the Local Government (Planning and Land) Act 1980 and the Local Government Act 1988 for the financial year 1994–95 in both cash and constant prices. [7141]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 2 December 1996]:* A detailed list, taken from annual reports submitted by authorities, of the surpluses and deficits achieved by direct labour and direct service organisations of Scottish local authorities in 1994–95 is as follows:

Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980
surpluses/deficits on DLO/DSO activity in 1994–95 in £s

Local authority	*New construction over £50,000*	*New construction under £50,000*	*Building maintenance*	*General highways work*	*General water and sewerage work*
Aberdeen DC	—	—	220,410	—	—
Angus DC	—	—	—	—	—
Annandale and Eskdale DC	—	—	—	—	—
Argyll and Bute DC	—	—	55,000	—	—
Badenoch and Strathspey DC	—	—	—	—	—
Banff and Buchan DC	—	—	59,444	—	—
Bearsden and Milngavie DC	—	—	—	—	—
Berwickshire DC	—	—	—	—	—
Borders RC	—	—	—	337,000	—

Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980
surpluses/deficits on DLO/DSO activity in 1994–95 in £s

Local authority	*New construction over £50,000*	*New construction under £50,000*	*Building maintenance*	*General highways work*	*General water and sewerage work*
Caithness DC	—	—	27,933	—	—
Central RC	(–21,343)	21,871	57,071	277,398	60,579
Clackmannan DC	—	—	265,000	—	—
Clydebank DC	—	—	88,773	—	—
Clydesdale DC	—	—	40,599	—	—
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth DC	—	—	—	—	—
Cumnock and Doon Valley DC	—	—	16,110	—	—
Cunninghame DC	—	—	740,000	—	—
Dumbarton DC	—	—	65,458	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway RC	—	—	2,163	282,935	—
Dundee DC	56,899	5,990	315,013	—	—
Dunfermline DC	44,083	37,737	81,687	—	—
East Kilbride DC	—	—	—	—	—
East Lothian DC	—	—	363,821	—	—
Eastwood DC	—	—	—	—	—
Edinburgh DC	(–25,781)	—	284,775	—	—
Ettrick and Lauderdale DC	—	—	121,882	—	—
Falkirk DC	—	—	182,000	—	—
Fife RC	81,000	14,000	173,000	962,000	34,000
Glasgow DC	12,892,110	—	11,695,268	—	—
Gordon DC	—	—	—	—	—
Grampian RC	—	—	—	757,000	175,000
Hamilton DC	—	—	82,647	—	—
Highland RC	—	—	—	2,748,000	—
Inverclyde DC	—	—	37,450	—	—
Inverness DC	—	—	181,442	—	—
Kilmarnock and Loudoun DC	—	—	—	—	—
Kincardine and Deeside DC	—	—	—	—	—
Kirkcaldy DC	—	—	168,013	—	—
Kyle and Carrick DC	—	—	85,437	—	—
Lochaber DC	—	—	—	—	—
Lothian RC	—	—	201,268	706,523	142,786
Midlothian DC	—	—	58,000	—	—
Monklands DC	—	—	—	—	—
Moray DC	—	—	95,560	—	—
Motherwell DC	—	—	335,782	—	—
Nairn DC	—	—	—	—	—
Nithsdale DC	—	—	(–22,822)	—	—
North East Fife DC	—	—	110,000	—	—
Orkney IC	(–46,000)	—	54,000	304,000	(–203,000)
Perth and Kinross DC	—	—	151,653	—	—
Renfrew DC	—	—	1,359,836	—	—
Ross and Cromarty DC	—	—	28,000	—	—
Roxburgh DC	—	—	14,000	—	—
Shetland IC	—	—	57,000	340,000	—
Skye and Lochalsh DC	—	—	—	—	—
Stewartry DC	—	—	—	—	—
Stirling DC	—	—	(–13,500)	—	—
Strathclyde RC	7,230	1,242	487,983	537,129	94,944
Strathkelvin DC	—	—	89,262	—	—
Sutherland DC	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside RC	—	—	16,000	887,000	—
Western Isles IC	—	—	36,000	182,000	—
West Lothian DC	—	—	178,410	—	—
Wigtown DC	—	—	173,469	—	—

Local Government Act 1988
surpluses/deficits on DLO/DSO activity in 1994–95 in £s

Local authority	*Refuse collection*[1]	*Building cleaning*	*Other cleaning*[1]	*School and welfare catering*	*Other catering*	*Ground maintenance*	*Vehicle maintenance*	*Leisure management*
Aberdeen DC	51,077	63	—	—	9,200	101,804	47,672	546,163
Angus DC	218,515	27,418	78,523	—	—	181,779	25,067	—
Annandale and Eskdale DC	51,163	—	39,543	—	—	27,921	—	29,189

Local Government Act 1988
surpluses/deficits on DLO/DSO activity in 1994–95 in £s

Local authority	*Refuse collection*[1]	*Building cleaning*	*Other cleaning*[1]	*School and welfare catering*	*Other catering*	*Ground maintenance*	*Vehicle maintenance*	*Leisure management*
Argyll and Bute DC	42,000	—	6,000	—	—	12,000	23,000	21,000
Badenoch and Strathspey DC	5,978	—	2,689	—	—	19,110	—	—
Banff and Buchan DC	9,793	—	—	—	—	161,794	—	—
Bearsden and Milngavie DC	—	—	70,478	—	—	—	44,299	14,970
Berwickshire DC	52,117	—	—	—	—	54,193	—	(–5,939)
Borders RC	—	—	—	—	—	—	30,000	—
Caithness DC	22,092	—	—	—	—	18,162	—	32,201
Central RC	—	5,561	—	36,409	3,420	—	21,900	—
Clackmannan DC	—	—	—	—	—	43,000	10,000	—
Clydebank DC	26,894	—	35,368	—	—	118,449	—	34,328
Clydesdale DC	1,433	—	7,163	—	—	18,497	—	56,811
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth DC	9,002	—	6,243	—	—	34,246	14,468	23,031
Cumnock and Doon Valley DC	50,981	—	16,912	—	—	21,480	—	—
Cunninghame DC	30,262	14,228	19,465	—	—	22,409	45,014	47,627
Dumbarton DC	30,452	(–45,783)	(–38,216)	—	—	(–217,009)	—	139,968
Dumfries and Galloway RC	—	(–118,000)	—	16,000	—	51,000	69,000	—
Dundee DC	143,080	25,065	20,534	—	—	188,363	—	133,000
Dunfermline DC	147,370	23,000	—	—	—	53,437	13,667	43,000
East Kilbride DC	60,742	—	65,347	—	—	37,345	17,384	194,370
East Lothian DC	—	30,331	89,787	—	—	134,777	—	70,346
Eastwood DC	(–89,870)	—	(–11,600)	—	—	19,610	—	(–13,385)
Edinburgh DC	82,811	149,342	59,369	—	(–76,040)	268,433	77,706	8,118
Ettrick and Lauderdale DC	157,990	—	—	—	—	136,758	—	60,229
Falkirk DC	87,000	2,000	183,000	—	25,000	259,000	14,000	159,000
Fife RC	—	2,000	—	28,000	(–8,000)	—	165,000	—
Glasgow DC	640,061	196,996	384,342	—	—	941,187	102,613	211,969
Gordon DC	14,000	—	92,000	—	—	48,000	—	—
Grampian RC	—	(–351,000)	—	9,000	111,000	224,000	532,000	—
Hamilton DC	25,457	—	49,668	—	—	133,057	19,834	231,746
Highland RC	—	6,816	—	(–43,229)	—	—	211,976	—
Inverclyde DC	105,355	—	112,311	—	—	15,093	46,073	127,394
Inverness DC	159,911	—	118,784	—	—	103,800	6,214	53,005
Kilmarnock and Loudoun DC	51,000	3,000	53,000	—	1,000	32,000	440,000	1,000
Kincardine and Deeside DC	2,943	—	45,565	—	—	—	—	33,058
Kirkcaldy DC	283,805	2,091	170,357	—	—	222,118	152,397	276,672
Kyle and Carrick DC	26,160	16,187	—	—	—	17,784	4,553	37,028
Lochaber DC	13,259	—	5,532	—	—	38,150	—	10,842
Lothian RC	—	14,985	—	38,853	17,243	—	84,989	(–188,629)
Midlothian DC	47,000	—	—	—	—	143,000	38,000	170,000
Monklands DC	84,940	6,017	71,433	—	—	103,956	79,667	68,797
Moray DC	50,816	3,182	77,562	—	—	61,787	53,024	—
Motherwell DC	314,421	8,489	—	—	13,038	—	34,496	71,108
Nairn DC	—	—	23,045	—	—	10,690	—	970
Nithsdale DC	500	—	500	—	—	26,573	—	13,159
North East Fife DC	83,000	—	85,000	—	—	68,000	—	8,000
Orkney IC	19,000	15,000	—	6,000	—	—	58,000	—
Perth and Kinross DC	52,449	54,921	15,051	—	—	—	22,050	152,231
Renfrew DC	268,000	17,000	42,000	—	2,228	314,000	79,000	129,000
Ross and Cromarty DC	22,296	—	—	—	—	20,000	—	20,214
Roxburgh DC	19,954	—	27,445	—	—	43,319	8,798	25,961
Shetland IC	134,000	7,000	7,000	—	84,000	79,000	42,000	—
Skye and Lochalsh DC	(–10,025)	(–109)	3,080	—	—	(–6,700)	—	(–3,767)
Stewartry DC	—	—	—	—	—	43,179	—	—
Stirling DC	57,500	12,200	48,700	—	—	69,700	24,300	32,800
Strathclyde RC	—	691,106	—	101,652	7,008	27,129	227,418	—
Strathkelvin DC	237,061	—	—	—	—	117,078	—	49,622
Sutherland DC	10,152	—	—	—	—	12,078	—	4,344
Tayside RC	—	56,000	—	265,000	—	—	101,000	—
Western Isles IC	51,000	47,000	51,000	(–42,000)	9,000	10,000	12,000	—
West Lothian DC	—	—	77,830	—	—	292,025	921	228,845
Wigtown DC	—	—	16,075	—	—	94,887	—	34,874

[1] The accounts for refuse collection and other cleaning may have been combined by some authorities. The absence of an entry, therefore, does not necessarily indicate that the DSO has not carried out the activity in question.

Roads Programme

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the impact of the Budget statement on the projected programme for the construction of the M80 motorway between Stepps and Haggs; and if he will make a statement. [7832]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* My right hon. Friend will make a statement on these matters in the near future.

TREASURY

Computers

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Bank of England is taking to ensure the millennium compliance of its computer systems and those with which they are connected; what is its budget for this purpose; and if he will make a statement. [6665]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Bank of England has already begun to prepare its own computer systems for the millennium. It is also liaising with APACS—the Association for Payment Clearing Services—which oversees the payments systems, and with commercial banks. No separate budget has been set for this process, which will be accommodated within departmental software development budgets.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of how much it currently costs to answer *(a)* an oral and *(b)* a written parliamentary question. [7642]

Mrs. Angela Knight: A total of £249 and £107 respectively, as I stated in my reply to the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) on 4 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *656*.

Unemployment

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what forecast of those registered as unemployed on the claimant count in 1997–98 underlay his assumptions in respect of resources available for out-of-work benefits and related passported entitlements; and if he will list this forecast for changes in levels of claimant count unemployment in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98 and *(c)* 1998–99. [7477]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The assumptions for unemployment which underlie the public expenditure plans are given in table 5A.5 of the 1997–98 "Financial Statement and Budget Report."

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department plans to spend on celebrating Christmas and the new year. [7487]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* Such costs are included in the Department's running cost expenditure, which is published in the annual report.

National Insurance

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each source of taxation revenue and for national insurance, (i) the amounts received and what percentage that is of total revenue and (ii) the numbers of people paying in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 1995. [3044]

Mr. Jack: Information on the amounts received is in the table. Figures for the numbers of people paying some of these taxes is contained in "Inland Revenue Statistics", a copy of which is in the Library. Information on the numbers of people paying other taxes is not available.

Tax and national insurance receipts (on a cash basis) £ billions

	1980–81	*1985–86*	*1990–91*	*1995–96*
Income tax	242.99	353.58	552.89	680.72
Corporation tax	460.2	103.80	210.44	235.69
Value added tax	109.68	193.29	309.91	430.73
Excise duties[1]	889.8	148.98	199.36	283.55
Other taxes and royalties[2]	225.70	412.95	407.02	442.34
Social security contributions	140.57	244.65	354.10	444.79
Total	853.94	1,457.25	2,033.72	2,517.82

[1] Fuel, alcohol and tobacco duties and VED. [2] Includes local taxes as well as other central government taxes.

As a percentage of total

	1980–81	*1985–86*	*1990–91*	*1995–96*
Income tax	28.5	24.3	27.2	27.0
Corporation tax	5.4	7.1	10.3	9.4
Value added tax	12.8	13.3	15.2	17.1
Excise duties[1]	10.4	10.2	9.8	11.3
Other taxes and royalties[2]	26.4	28.3	20.0	17.6
National insurance contributions	16.5	16.8	17.4	17.7
Total	100	100	100	100

[1] Fuel, alcohol and tobacco duties and VED. [2] Includes local taxes as well as other central government taxes.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Minimum Wage

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those countries in the European Union where a minimum wage has been imposed following a directive from the European Commission. [7012]

Mr. John M. Taylor: There is no requirement for states in the European Union to introduce minimum wages. Arrangements for determining pay is a matter for individual member states—a fact recognised in the Commission's opinion on an equitable wage.

Nuclear Materials (Accounting and Control)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what review his Department has conducted of its system of accounting and control of nuclear materials at nuclear plants and nuclear fuel cycle facilities. [6992]

Mr. Nelson: All civil nuclear material in the United Kingdom is subject to Euratom safeguards and to the terms of the UK-International Atomic Energy Authority-Euratom safeguards agreement. My Department liaises with the international inspectorates to ensure that these obligations are met. This includes reviews of the systems of nuclear material accounting and control at facilities. The United Kingdom will also continue to offer its full support to the development of a strengthened international safeguards system.

Child Labour

Miss Lestor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment his Department has made of the report, "Helping Business to Help Stop Child Labour", produced by Anti-Slavery International; what action he is

taking to encourage British businesses abroad to adopt fair employment practices; and if he will make a statement. [7245]

Mr. Nelson: It is for British businesses to ensure that they are complying fully with their legal obligations and ethical standards. The Government encourage British businesses operating overseas to respect the OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises, which cover employment practices, among other things.

Miss Lestor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make it his policy to encourage British companies overseas to act as model employers by taking action to avoid exploitative practices, particularly involving children. [7247]

Mr. Nelson: It is the responsibility of individual companies to satisfy themselves that they are complying with local law and acting in accordance with ethical standards. The Government encourage British businesses operating overseas to respect the OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises, which cover employment practices, among other things.

EU Common External Tariff Level

Mr. Shore: To ask the Secretary of the Board of Trade what is the 1996 average level of the common external tariff of the European Union; what was the average level in *(a)* 1966, *(b)* 1976 and *(c)* 1986; and what the common tariff level is planned to be when the Uruguay round is finally implemented. [7461]

Mr. Nelson: In 1966, 1976 and 1986, the average levels of the common external tariff of the European Union in the industrial sector were in the order of 12 per cent.,
9.5 per cent. and 6.5 per cent. respectively. Precise figures are not available. Moreover, there are no equivalent figures for the agricultural sector in those years because chapters 1 to 24 of the common external tariff then contained many specific rates, for example by weight or by volume. The Uruguay round of multilateral trade negotiations was the first such round in which the ad valorem equivalents of specific rates were calculated, thus enabling inclusion of agricultural products in the average tariff level. The average level of the overall common external tariff in 1996 is 4 per cent. When the Uruguay round is fully implemented it will be 3.2 per cent.

Small Businesses

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 2 December, *Official Report*, column *498*, on small business statistics, if he will name the two independent sources. [8028]

Mr. Page: The information requested is in my answer of 2 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *498*.

Armoured Vehicles (Indonesia)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about exports of armoured vehicles to Indonesia. [8636]

Mr. Lang: I have authorised the issue of licences to Alvis for the export of a further 50 armoured vehicles, and their associated equipment, to Indonesia. The decision has been made following consultation with the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in the light of the established and internationally agreed criteria for military exports.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the export of armoured vehicles to the Indonesian police force. [8635]

Mr. Lang: I have authorised the issue of an export licence to Procurement Services International Ltd. for a variety of police vehicles. The licence includes seven Tactica water cannon and associated equipment. This decision has been made following consultation with the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the light of the established and internationally agreed criteria for military exports.

Energy Council

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the outcome of the Energy Council meeting on 3 December. [8632]

Mr. Page: The Council considered several issues and received reports from the Commission on matters of interest. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Energy represented the United Kingdom.

A policy debate was held to discuss the way forward on a proposal to liberalise the gas market. The Council recognised the presidency's compromise proposals as an important step in the right direction and as a good basis for progress in further discussions. There was considerable convergence of views on the four key issues of public service obligations, unbundling and transparency of accounts, access to the system and take or pay contracts. The Council agreed that further work was required in order to ensure a rigid conclusion of this proposal under the Dutch presidency, due to end in June 1997.

The Council discussed a proposal for a Council regulation establishing a multi-annual programme to promote international co-operation in the energy field—SYNERGY—and asked for work on this dossier to continue.

A debate was also held on renewables following a Commission presentation on an EU strategy. Lord Fraser stressed that renewable forms of energy had to be both economically attractive and environmentally acceptable if they were successfully to penetrate the market.

Council conclusions were agreed on a Committee report on oil supply, refining and markets in the Community. The conclusions welcomed the report and asked the Commission to undertake studies and continue to monitor and analyse the situation in close co-operation with member states.

Conclusions were also agreed on the energy dimension of climate change. They recognised the contribution of energy policy to the climate change debate and asked for reports to be made on progress in this area including on the negotiations on a protocol in the framework of the UN convention on climate change.

On deregulation, the Council endorsed a report from the Commission on the review of Community energy legislation which will enable several legislative acts to be repealed.

The Council reached a common position on a proposal for a Council and European Parliament decision amending the guidelines on trans-European energy networks, updating the list of projects of common interest.

The Council agreed the decision on the conclusion of the energy charter treaty.

The Commission gave a presentation on a proposal for a council decision on the organisation of co-operation around agreed Community energy objectives. The Commission also gave progress reports on the energy dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, the proposed electricity liberalisation directive, the proposed decision on a multi-annual programme for the promotion of energy efficiency in the Community—SAVE II—and the proposed directive on rational planning techniques in the electricity and gas sectors, and gave information on the auto-oil programme.

Private Utilities (Directors)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with the directors of the private utilities regarding their pay and conditions. [6500]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The remuneration of directors at the privatised utilities is a matter for the companies and their shareholders.

Electro-magnetic Compatibility Directive

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress he has made in securing modifications to the European Union's electro-magnetic compatibility directive to minimise the cost of compliance for British small businesses. [6510]

Mr. Ian Taylor: My Department continues to seek support from other member states for modifications to the directive, and we have requested the European Commission to review the directive in 1997 as part of the simpler legislation for the internal market—SLIM. The Government have also commissioned a consultant to study compliance problems concentrating on the problems faced by small and medium enterprises. Meanwhile, the Department supplies guidance to business on how to minimise compliance costs.

Competition Policy

Mr. Wigley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on progress towards implementing the Government's manifesto commitments in respect of competition policy. [6511]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Government are committed to the reform of competition law. In March of this year, my Department published a consultation document on the approach to reform, and in August we published a draft Competition Bill. We intend to introduce the Bill when parliamentary time allows.

TRANSPORT

M1

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the capacity of the M1 between each junction from junction 1 to Luton, assuming typical flow composition, traffic speeds and weather; and what the current flows are for the hours of *(a)* 7 am to 10 am and *(b)* 4 pm to 7 pm as a percentage of that capacity between each junction; [6802]

(2) what have been the accident rates in each of the past five years per mile of motorway *(a)* on the M1 between junction 1 and Luton and *(b)* on the motorway network as a whole. [6801]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. James Pawsey, dated 9 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent questions about traffic flows and accident rates on the M1 between Junction 1 and Luton (Junction 10).

There is no precise measure of road capacity which can be universally applied, even for motorways. The spacing of junctions and the volumes of traffic leaving and joining can have a significant impact on capacity for a typical motorway. The capacities used in calculating the percentages in the table below have assumed a maximum flow per lane per hour of 2,000 vehicles. At this level, the average speed will be significantly lower than the National speed limit. This is also the point at which stop/start conditions may be expected arising from traffic joining and leaving the motorway, incidents, poor driver behaviour or adverse weather conditions.

Junction	*Vehicles southbound 7am –10am*	*Vehicles northbound 7am –10am*	*Vehicles southbound 4pm–7pm*	*Vehicles northbound 4pm –7pm*
1–2 (3 lanes dual)	10,000 (56 per cent.)	4,500 (25 per cent.)	5,100 (28 per cent.)	9,100 (50 per cent.)
2–4 (3 lanes dual)	12,200 (68 per cent.)	5,600 (31 per cent.)	6,000 (33 per cent.)	11,200 (62 per cent.)
4–5 (3 lanes dual)	13,700 (76 per cent.)	7,100 (39 per cent.)	7,300 (41 per cent.)	12,800 (71 per cent.)
5–6 (3 lanes dual)	11,000 (61 per cent.)	6,200 (34 per cent.)	7,200 (45 per cent.)	11,200 (62 per cent.)
6—6a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
6a–7 (4 lanes N/B, 3 lanes S/B)	15,00 (83 per cent.)	11,5000 (48 per cent)	12,000 (67 per cent)	15,000 (63 per cent.)
7–8 (4 lanes dual)	17,800 (74 per cent.)	14,100 (59 per cent.)	14, 600 (61 per cent.)	18,100 (75 per cent.)
8–9 (3 lanes dual)	13,000 (72 per cent.)	11,200 (62 per cent.)	12,200 (68 per cent.)	15,100 (84 per cent.)
9–10 (4 lanes N/B, 3 lanes S/B)	11,300 (63 per cent.)	11,000 (46 per cent.)	11,500 (64 per cent.)	15,600 (65 per cent.)

n/a = not available.

Figures in percentages are the actual flows as a percentage of the capacity based on 2,000 vehicles per lane per hour.

Details of the accident rates for the main carriageway of the M1 between Junction 1 and Junction 10, together with the national accident rates are set out in the table below. The rates are provided both in terms of the number of accidents per mile, and in terms of the number of accidents per 100 million vehicle miles travelled, the measure normally used when comparing safety records between different sections of road.

Year	*National rate (accidents/mile)*	*M1(J1–J10) rate (accidents/mile)*	*National rate (accidents/100 million vehicle miles)*	*M1(J1–J10) rate (accidents/100 million vehicle miles)*
1991	3.42	7.48	16.5	14.8
1992	3.54	8.21	17.7	16.3
1993	3.76	8.85	17.7	17.6
1994	3.92	7.69	17.7	15.3
1995	3.99	9.57	17.0	19.0

Motorway Cleaning

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) of 18 November, *Official Report*, column *410*, on cleaning motorways, how many people are employed by the Highways Agency to inspect the state of cleanliness of motorways. [7282]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Harry Barnes, dated 9 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people are employed by the Highways Agency to inspect the state of cleanliness of motorways.

The Highways Agency does not directly employ any staff to carry out this function. Management of motorway cleaning is delegated to Maintaining Agents, most of whom are local highway authorities. These Maintaining Agents employ sufficient staff to ensure that the Highways Agency's requirements, set out in its Code of Practice for Routine Maintenance, are met.

Channel Tunnel

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, column *266*, if he will require Eurotunnel to publish the results of evacuation tests in the channel tunnel. [7647]

Mr. Watts: It is for Eurotunnel to decide whether the results of evacuation tests in the channel tunnel are published. My Department has no power to require publication.

Rail Privatisation (Consultants)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many consultants employed by Samuel Montague in relation to rail privatisation were paid over £100 per hour. [7649]

Mr. Watts: The rates of pay of employees of consultants are a matter for their employers.

Rail Service Information

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received about the provision of information on rail services by Rail Direct; and if he will make a statement. [8019]

Mr. Watts: Since April 1996, my Department has received 14 representations about the provision of

information on rail services by Rail Direct and other telephone inquiry bureaux.

Rail Passenger Complaints

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the average cost of dealing with a railway passenger's complaint under the former system in the last year in which it operated; and what procedures are now in place to deal with complaints. [7966]

Mr. Watts: The information requested on the average cost of dealing with railway passenger complaints is not available.

All train operators have in place a complaints handling procedure which has been approved by the Rail Regulator and conforms to the guidelines issued by him. The procedures, among other matters, detail time limits for action so that complaints are kept informed of the progress in dealing with their complaint.

Polystyrene (Fire Risks)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 29 November, *Official Report*, column *418*, if he will place in the Library copies of the research undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive into the fire and smoke hazards of polystyrene, together with its recommendations. [7775]

Mr. Watts: Copies of the reports "Assessment of fire hazard of materials: Report 1/8/88 to 1/11/88", G. Atkinson, HSE report and "The medium scale fire test facility: final report on commissioning trials", R. K. Wharton, HSE report 1985 have been placed in the Library of the House.

Railway Claims

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to persuade private wagon owners to join the claims, handling and allocation arrangements operated by Railway Claims Ltd. [8084]

Mr. Watts: The Rail Regulator published a consultation document in August 1996, about insurance against third party liability, a copy of which was placed in the Library. He intends to initiate a group to explore the railway claims handling and third party liability issues raised by the operation of private wagons.

Drivers (Eye Tests)

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many police forces in the United Kingdom have instituted on-the-spot eye tests for drivers; and if he will make a statement. [8094]

Mr. Bowis: We have no information on the policies of individual police forces in respect of on-the-spot eye tests. In the event of a road traffic incident, the police make a judgment about whether eyesight may have been a factor, and act accordingly—using the number plate test as a quick check if necessary.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce on-the-spot eye tests for drivers; and if he will make a statement. [8095]

Mr. Bowis: None. Drivers are reminded of the need to assure themselves regularly that they can still meet the requirements of the number plate test and of their statutory obligation, if they cannot do so, to cease driving and notify the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

Rail Franchises

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the value of the performance bonds which could be called in by the franchising director in the event of the need to terminate each of the franchises so far awarded. [8079]

Mr. Watts: The information is available in respect of franchises which have commenced operation, and is set out in the table:

Franchise	*Performance bond (£ million)*
Cardiff Railway Company	0.90
Chiltern Railway Company	2.15
Connex South Central	14.50
Connex South Eastern	19.50
Gatwick Express	2.50
Great North Eastern Railway	17.75
Great Western Trains	16.50
Island Lines	0.15
LTS Rail	4.00
Midland Main Line	6.50
South Wales and West	5.00
South West Trains	21.00
Thames Trains	4.25

Fatal Accidents

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many fatal accidents there were per 1,000 miles of travel on British *(a)* railways, *(b)* motorways and *(c)* non-motorway roads in the last year for which figures are available. [7498]

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available in the form requested.

French Lorry Drivers' Strike

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what progress has been made in securing compensation from the French authorities for British lorry drivers who were stranded during the French lorry driver dispute; [8114]

(2) how many compensation claims made by British lorry drivers who were stranded during the French lorry driver dispute have been met *(a)* in part and *(b)* in full by the French authorities to date; [8115]

(3) what has been the average values of compensation paid to British lorry drivers by the French authorities in relation to claims resulting from the French lorry driver dispute; [8116]

(4) how much has been paid in compensation by the French authorities to British lorry drivers stranded during the French lorry driver dispute; [8117]

(5) what action he has taken to ensure British lorry drivers' compensation claims resulting from the French lorry driver dispute are met in full by the French authorities. [8118]

Mr. Watts: My right hon. Friend obtained firm assurances from the French Transport Minister that claims for damage to vehicles or loads and for loss of earnings will be considered, and as quickly as possible. We are seeking to clarify this week with the French authorities the procedures and administrative arrangements for submitting claims. Thereafter, we shall press the French for swift settlement.

Shipping

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on Government plans to promote the environmental advantages of shipping as a means of transporting freight. [7839]

Mr. Bowis: It must be for industry to determine whether water can provide both a practical means to its transport needs and make good commercial sense.

We encourage industry to consider the benefits of using shipping as an alternative to road transport where this is feasible.

Freight facilities grants are available for inland waterway capital developments that can demonstrate environmental benefits through saving lorry miles.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his Department's plans to support the British-registered merchant navy. [7840]

Mr. Bowis: We recognise that shipping makes an important contribution to our nation's well-being. We have put in place a range of targeted measures, including simplified procedures, liberalised officer nationality requirements, substantial and effective financial assistance to seafarer training and tax incentives to replace aging tonnage.

We have also taken tough action against sub-standard shipping and continue to urge other countries to exercise discipline in the use of market-distorting state aids.

These measures are making a positive contribution to the industry's competitive position in increasingly competitive international markets, the attractiveness of the red ensign and career opportunities for British seafarers.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the perceived political loyalty of magistrates in each area of Wales, appointed in each of the past seven years. [7499]

Mr. Streeter: The stated political affiliation of magistrates in each preserved county in Wales appointed in each of the past seven years, is as follows:

Preserved County	*Year*	*Conservative*	*Labour*	*Liberal/ Democrat*	*Plaid Cymru*	*Independent*	*Not known*	*Total*
Clwyd	1990	5	9	5	2	2	0	23
	1991	4	8	0	2	3	0	17
	1992	18	10	9	1	1	0	39
	1993	11	6	7	0	0	0	24
	1994	9	6	5	1	0	0	21
	1995	10	10	1	1	0	0	22
	1996	3	4	0	1	0	0	8
Dyfed	1990	3	3	4	0	0	3	13
	1991	5	6	3	3	2	0	19
	1992	6	2	3	0	5	0	16
	1993	4	7	5	3	5	0	24
	1994	1	4	2	1	4	0	12
	1995	6	8	4	8	3	3	32
	1996	0	4	0	1	0	0	5
Mid Glamorgan	1990	6	11	0	1	0	1	19
	1991	6	13	0	0	6	0	25
	1992	3	11	1	1	0	0	16
	1993	4	5	4	1	0	0	14
	1994	3	7	2	1	3	0	16
	1995	2	4	1	0	0	0	7
	1996	1	7	0	1	0	0	9
South Glamorgan	1990	7	6	6	1	4	0	23
	1991	7	2	3	2	3	0	17
	1992	9	6	6	1	0	3	25
	1993	10	9	3	1	3	0	26
	1994	6	8	2	0	5	0	21
	1995	5	7	3	0	3	0	18
	1996	6	9	4	0	1	0	20

Preserved County	Year	Conservative	Labour	Liberal/ Democrat	Plaid Cymru	Independent	Not known	Total
West Glamorgan	1990	9	8	4	0	2	0	23
	1991	8	6	1	0	0	0	15
	1992	8	12	5	0	0	0	25
	1993	8	5	2	1	4	0	20
	1994	1	13	7	1	1	0	23
	1995	0	9	0	0	2	0	11
	1996	1	3	0	0	0	0	4
Gwent	1990	6	3	0	0	3	0	12
	1991	6	4	3	0	0	0	13
	1992	2	6	2	0	0	0	10
	1993	3	5	1	0	1	0	12
	1994	3	12	1	0	2	0	18
	1995	3	5	0	0	2	0	10
	1996	2	3	0	0	2	0	7
Gwynedd	1990	5	4	1	3	4	0	17
	1991	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
	1992	3	2	6	3	0	0	14
	1993	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
	1994	1	0	0	4	0	0	5
	1995	2	3	1	3	0	0	9
	1996	3	1	1	2	0	0	7
Powys	1990	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1991	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
	1992	2	0	1	1	2	0	6
	1993	2	2	3	1	1	1	10
	1994	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	1995	2	0	2	0	0	0	4
	1996	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Reconciliation Services

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what sums will be allocated for reconciliation services as a result of the Family Law Act 1996; and if such funds will be used solely for reconciling the couple to remaining married. [8186]

Mr. Streeter: The Lord Chancellor announced on 6 November that he was inviting tenders for a programme of pilot projects in order to identify types of service with particular potential for reducing the incidence of marriage breakdown and its consequent cost. Tenders have been invited from marriage support organisations. All valid bids will be evaluated on merit after 17 January 1997. Funding under the programme will be available for a range of marriage support services, including marriage preparation. The sums allocated will depend on the number of bids received which meet the pilot programme objectives.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Emergency Relief

25. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the consequences of the Chancellor's Budget statement for his Department's expenditure in respect of emergency relief. [6523]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Chancellor's statement will have no direct or indirect effect on the capacity of the ODA to continue to provide overseas emergency relief.

Rwanda

27. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current level of aid to Rwanda. [6525]

Dr. Liam Fox: Since April 1994, the United Kingdom has committed over £137 million bilaterally and in support of European Union actions to help meet emergency and rehabilitation needs in Rwanda and those of Rwandan refugees.

Lome Convention

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with other EU countries regarding the future of the Lomé convention. [6524]

Dr. Liam Fox: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has discussed this topic in several recent meetings with her counterparts from other EU member states. Most recently, the topic was raised at the EU Development Council on 22 November, where Ministers had the opportunity for an initial exchange of views on the issue.

Belarus

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what current financial

assistance is being committed for the assistance of the economy in the Republic of Belarus; and if he will make a statement. [6527]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Government are not providing financial assistance to Belarus. That country has benefited from a modest level of technical assistance from the know-how fund and from our contributions to the multilateral agencies.

Bilateral Aid

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what expenditure, in 1996 prices, his Department has incurred on consultants, including management consultants, on the bilateral aid programme in 1995–96. [6976]

Dr. Liam Fox: Expenditure on consultants, including management consultants, for 1995–96 was £171,770,000. This sum covers contracts with individuals, charitable agencies, universities and commercial companies.

ENVIRONMENT

Town Centres

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the implications for Government policy on town centres of his Department's decision to contribute towards the research by the Association of Town Centre Management into the feasibility of US-style town and city improvement zones. [7174]

Sir Paul Beresford: This research is exploring the feasibility of a variety of approaches, based on voluntary participation, and is in line with our response to the Environment Committee to work with ATCM and others. I cannot prejudge the outcome of the research.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what external legal advice he has taken in respect of the Audit Commission's use of the powers set out in sections 28 and 29 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982; and if he will make a statement. [7644]

Sir Paul Beresford: It is for the Audit Commission to satisfy itself that it is acting fully within its powers under sections 28 and 29 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money is to be yielded by national domestic rates in 1996–97; what percentage of that amount is allocated to local government and how much of that amount was held back by the Treasury in 1996–97; and what estimate he has made of the figures in each case for 1997–98. [7476]

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) on 27 November, *Official Report,* column *242–44.*

Because of the pooling arrangements, it is not possible to say what percentage of the non-domestic rates yield for any one year is allocated to local government in that year. Under paragraph 8 of schedule 8 to the Local Government Finance Act 1998, the Secretary of State for the Environment is required to distribute to local authorities the total amount which he estimates will be paid into the pool, after adjusting for any deficit or surplus brought forward from the previous year.

By the end of 1996–97, the amount distributed from the pool since 1990–91 to local authorities will total £81.476 billion, while the amounts paid into the pool are estimated to total £80.631 billion over the same period: the deficit on the pool at the end of 1996–97 is, therefore, estimated to be £0.845 billion. Taking account of estimated payments into the pool of £12.873 billion in 1997–98, the amount paid into the pool between 1990–91 and 1997–98 is estimated to total £93.503 billion, and will equal the amount distributed to local authorities over the same period.

Self-employed (Deaths and Injuries)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the rate of *(a)* death and *(b)* major injury among the self-employed in each of the last 10 years. [7526]

Sir Paul Beresford: The fatal and major injury incidence rates for self-employed people for all industry, as reported to health and safety enforcing authorities, were as follows:

Year	*Fatal rate (per 100,000)*	*Major injury rate (per 100,000)*
1986–87	2.0	26.9
1987–88	3.0	31.0
1988–89	2.7	39.4
1989–90	3.3	41.2
1990–91	2.7	41.2
1991–92	2.1	33.1
1992–93	2.0	35.8
1993–94	1.6	40.6
1994–95	2.5	40.4
1995–96[1]	1.5	35.9

[1] Provisional.

Shellfish

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many and what proportion of England's shellfish waters have been designated as safe under the shellfish waters directive 79/923. [7683]

Mr. Clappison: The shellfish waters directive applies to coastal and brackish waters designated by member states and defines quality objectives to protect the development of shellfish populations from the principal sources of pollution. Seventeen such waters have been designated in England, and the Environment Agency monitoring results for 1995 showed that over 80 per cent. complied with the directive's requirements. None of the failures was considered by the competent authority to have harmful consequences for the development of shellfish colonies.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will bring forward proposals to restore

for areas of outstanding natural beauty the same primary purpose as that pertaining to national parks. [7758]

Mr. Clappison: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the separation of the common primary purpose previously enjoyed by the national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty; and if he will make a statement. [7759]

Mr. Clappison: I am not aware of any such representations.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of the prosecutions brought for breaching asbestos regulations since 1986 resulted in the imposition of a fine; and what was the average value of the fine imposed. [7903]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is available only for prosecutions brought by the Health and Safety Executive's field operations directorate for breaches of the Asbestos Regulations 1969, the Asbestos (Licensing) Regulations 1983, the Asbestos (Prohibitions) Regulations 1985, the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987 and the Asbestos (Prohibitions) Regulations 1992, from 1 April 1986 to 31 March 1996.

Not all prosecutions brought result in a conviction, and not all convictions result in the imposition of a fine. However, fines were imposed in 354 instances and the average fine imposed was £840.

Nuclear Power Stations (Decommissioning)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the environmental impact of delaying the rate of decommissioning of nuclear power stations. [8047]

Mr. Clappison: Environmental impact assessment—EIA—of the decommissioning of nuclear power stations will be a new requirement, included in the proposed directive to amend EC directive 85/337/EEC—"the EIA directive". The Government are considering how this and other new requirements should be implemented.

Animals (Traditional Habitats)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to reintroduce fish species into habitats from which they have disappeared because of industrial and farming pollution. [7495]

Mr. Clappison: The Environment Agency identifies deficiencies in fish stocks through routine fishery surveys. Where the cause of such deficiencies is water pollution, the agency considers restocking as one of the options for restoring fisheries once the pollution has been remedied. In many cases, fish will recolonise naturally. More generally, the species recovery programme, which contributes to the UK biodiversity action plan, is concerned with the reintroduction of species of flora and fauna to traditional habitats.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to reintroduce mammal species into traditional habitats in which they no longer occur. [7496]

Mr. Clappison: The species recovery programme—SRP—initiated in 1991 is a high priority for countryside agencies and makes an important contribution to the UK biodiversity action plan. The programme seeks to reintroduce species of flora and fauna to traditional habitats in which they no longer occur.

In addition to established SRPs, work is being advanced for the reintroduction of the dormouse, red squirrel and the otter. These measures accord with objectives outlined in the Government-endorsed UK steering group report on biodiversity, which sets out action plans for mammals and includes objectives and targets for the reintroduction of some mammals to areas where they have been lost.

Single Regeneration Budget (Bradford, West)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce his decision on the Bradford, West SRB bid; and if he will make a statement. [8006]

Sir Paul Beresford: Shortly.

Departmental Staff (Education)

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of his staff at G5 and above were educated at *(a)* independent schools, *(b)* the university of Oxford or the university of Cambridge and *(c)* independent schools and the universities of Oxford or Cambridge. [7981]

Sir Paul Beresford: No central record is kept of the status or type of school attended by members of the senior civil service in this Department. Thirty five-of-22 per cent. senior civil service officers attended the university of Oxford and 45—28 per cent.—attended the university of Cambridge. Therefore, 80—50 per cent.—attended the universities of Oxford or Cambridge.

Air Pollution

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in respect of the system of local air pollution control which was established under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. [8338]

Mr. Clappison: The Government have today published a progress report on the implementation of the system of local air pollution control which was established under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

The local air pollution control system specifies processes which are not to be operated without an authorisation from the relevant local authority. One of the main objectives of the system is to reduce industrial emissions and to improve local air quality.

The report show that, since 1991, business has submitted some 15,000 applications for authorisation. Local authorities have decided 92 per cent. of all applications. This is a considerable achievement, given the task which local authorities faced, not least in familiarising themselves with new legislation, procedure and technical information.

The report also highlights the important role local air pollution control will play in the successful development of the new system of local air quality management, which was established under the Environment Act 1995.

Local air pollution control should result in substantial improvements in air quality in locations where industry has been a significant air pollution source, helping us to achieve air quality targets and commitments.

For example, a large number of industrial emitters of volatile organic compounds fall within local air pollution control. The Government's strategy to secure a 30 per cent. reduction in annual volatile organic compound emissions between 1988 and 1999 places considerable reliance on the reductions in emissions of volatile organic compounds which will result from local air pollution control. Present indications are that, by 1999, the reduction may be of the order of 40 per cent., reflecting a significant contribution by local air pollution control.

One reason for the success of local air pollution control has been the adoption of a partnership approach. Central and local government, business and wider interests have been actively involved in the development of both policies and procedures.

While local air pollution control now appears to be firmly established and is operating effectively, the next five years will involve new challenges, including a substantial amount of upgrading of existing processes over the next two years. The report, which we have published today, will help to develop a clear view of the issues which face local air pollution control in the next few years and the priorities which should guide its development.

I have arranged for a copy of the report to be placed in the Library of the House.

British Waterways

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to begin consultations concerning the possibility of British Waterways becoming a statutory consultee within the planning process. [8333]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have today issued a consultation paper seeking views on a proposal that British Waterways should in future be consulted on planning applications that are likely to affect the canals, river navigation and reservoirs it owns or manages, and the associated canal feeders, watercourses and let-offs. Our concern at present is that British Waterways is not always being made aware of proposals that may affect the stability and integrity of the waterways for which it is responsible, with potential cost implications for all concerned. Copies of the paper have been placed in the House Libraries and distributed to local authorities and other interested organisations. We have asked for responses by 17 January 1997.

Contaminated Land

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provision other than supplementary credit approvals has been made by central Government for local authorities in respect of their responsibilities in relation to contaminated land under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in each year since 1993; and what provision he expects to be made in this respect for future years. [7920]

Mr. Clappison *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* Each year, the Government set a level of revenue spending—total standard spending, or TSS—which they consider appropriate for local authorities, in aggregate, to spend. TSS is made up from seven main service blocks. Provision for local authorities' existing expenditure on contaminated land under the statutory nuisance regime in part III of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 forms part of the other services block, as will revenue spending under the specific contaminated land regime in part IIA of that Act when those provisions are brought into force.

In deciding on the appropriate level of TSS each year, the Government take account of all spending pressures faced by local authorities, as well as the scope for efficiency savings and what the country as a whole can afford. TSS, however, is the Government's assessment of the appropriate level of spending in total. It is not possible to identify how much has been included to meet individual burdens or pressures.

Apart from the contaminated land supplementary credit approval programme, no specific provision is made by central Government for capital expenditure by local authorities in relation to their responsibilities for contaminated land under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Bodies

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many appointments to public bodies have been made on the recommendation of the Irish Government in each of the last 15 months. [6117]

Sir John Wheeler: Appointments are not made on the recommendation of the Irish Government. The Irish Government are entitled to propose candidates for consideration, alongside other candidates, for appointment to public bodies in Northern Ireland. The number of appointments made in each of the last 15 months of candidates proposed by the Irish Government is as follows:

Month	*Number of appointments resulting from Irish Government proposals*
1995	
September	0
October	0
November	0
December	0
1996	
January	2
February	1

Month	Number of appointments resulting from Irish Government proposals
March	2
April	1
May	1
June	2
July	1
August	1
September	0
October	1
November	[1]0
Total	12

[1] Up to 27 November.

Six of the appointments made in 1996 resulted from proposals made in 1995.

Inward Investment

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will *(a)* list those overseas companies which have chosen to locate or invest in Northern Ireland and *(b)* estimate the number of jobs created in Northern Ireland through inward investment in each of the last five years. [6371]

Mr. Ancram: A list of overseas companies which have been assisted by the Department of the Economic Development to locate or invest in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years is as follows. The list also includes the names of those overseas owned companies in the retail sector who are known to have announced projects in the period of the question.

Year	Company name
1991–92	Vision Information Consulting Ltd.
	BWC Textiles Ltd.
	Arntz Belting Co. Ltd.
	Canyon Europe Ltd.
	Circuits and Systems Design Ltd.
	Henry Denny and Sons (NI) Ltd.
	Northern Ireland Spinners Ltd.
	Irlandus Circuits Ltd.
	Sonoco Ltd.
	Lummus Mackie Ltd.
	Spanboard Ltd.
	Richardsons Fertilisers Ltd.
	3M Industrial Tapes Ltd.
1992–93	Olmedo Ltd.
	Pan European Textiles Ltd.
	Seagate Technology (Ireland)
	United Technologies Automotive (UK) Ltd.
	Fruit of the Loom Manufacturing Co. Ltd.
	Unidare Environmental Ltd.
	European Components Corporation
	Du Pont (UK) Ltd.
	Crossbows Optical Ltd.
	NIRAD Ltd.
	Norfil
1993–94	CCA Electronic Ltd.
	BCO Technologies (NI) Ltd.
	Charles Bell (1963) Ltd.
	Valence Technology BV10
	MKF (UK) Ltd.
	Benelux Manufacturing (NI) Ltd.
	CIS Data Ltd.
	Michelin Tyre Plc
	ESS Automotive Ltd.
	Unidare Plastics Ltd.
	Spanboard Products Ltd.
	Schrader Electronics Ltd.
	Lee Apparel (UK) Ltd.
	DDL Incorporated
	Seagate Technology (Ireland)
	Daewoo Electronics (UK) Ltd.
1994–95	Daewoo Electro Components UK Ltd.
	Radix Telecom Ltd.
	Northern Bank Factors Ltd.
	Daehwa Metal (UK) Ltd.
	ABC Labs (Europe) Ltd.
	Daewoo Electronics UK Ltd.
	CV Apparel Ltd.
	Harris Labs Ltd.
	Northern Telecom (NI) Ltd.
	Michelin Tyre Plc
	Rusch Manf (UK) Ltd.
	Seagate Technology (Ireland)
	Real Software (NI) Ltd.
	Schrader Electronics Ltd.
	Webtech (NI) Ltd.
	Fujitsu Fulcrum Telecom Ltd.
	Polarcup Ltd.
	Perfecseal Ltd.
	Glen Mouldings Ltd.
	Lurgan Fibre Ltd.
	Nacco Materials Handling Co. (NI) Ltd.
	Polystar (Ireland) Ltd.
	Smurfit Corrugated Cases (Lurgan) Ltd.
	Goldenvale Plc
	Ford Motor Co. Ltd.
1995–96	Aldiscon (NI) Ltd.
	Burnside Hydraulic Cylinders Ltd.
	Plastofilm Ltd.
	Duromold Ltd.
	Stream International (NI) Ltd.
	Copeland Ltd.
	Europa Tool Co. Ltd.
	Fruit of the Loom Manufacturing Co. Ltd.
	BCO Technologies (NI) Ltd.
	Montupet (UK) Ltd.
	Seagate Technology (Ireland)
	Scansoft (NI) Ltd.
	Regal Processors Ltd.
	North of Ireland Tanners Ltd.
	Short Brothers Plc (2 projects)
	Delwyn Enterprises Ltd.
	Baker Hughes Ltd.
	Trouw UK Ltd.
	Fujitsu Telecom Europe Ltd.
	Nacco Materials Handling Ltd.
	Webtech (NI) Ltd.
	Coca Cola Bottlers Ltd.
	Oneida Ltd.
	Jury's Hotel Group
	Carlingnose (NI) Ltd.
	Tinto Engineering (NI) Ltd.
	Seinex
	Vischem
	The Gap
	Musgrave Group
	Disney Store

These projects hold out the prospect of additional jobs, as follows:

Year of project	Jobs promoted
1991–92	489
1992–93	2,376
1993–94	2,475
1994–95	2,762
1995–96	3,971

Targeting of Social Need Initiative

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what monitoring of deprivation levels in parliamentary constituencies has been undertaken by Government Departments in each year since the introduction of the targeting of social need initiative; and if he will list the results recorded; [6781]

(2) what monitoring of deprivation levels in district council areas has been undertaken by Government Departments in each year since the introduction of the targeting of social need initiative; and if he will list the results recorded. [6785]

Sir John Wheeler: The 1994 Robson indicators—Department of Finance and Personnel, policy planning and research unit, occasional paper No. 28, "Relative Deprivation in Northern Ireland"—are used within Government to inform programmes which target social need and are available for local government districts, but not for parliamentary constituencies. This publication was placed in the House of Commons Library.

The dependence of the Robson measures on data from the decennial census of population precludes their use for routine monitoring of deprivation levels. However, some of the indicators making up the deprivation index are measured routinely. Unemployment levels by local government district area and parliamentary constituency, for example, are published monthly by the Department of Economic Development in its unemployment press notice.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* full-time, *(b)* part-time, *(c)* male and *(d)* female jobs there were in Northern Ireland in October 1979 and in October of every succeeding year until the present time. [6391]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 2 December 1996]:* The information requested is not available. However, data for September of each year are shown in the table:

Employers in Employment[1] in Northern Ireland

At September of each year

Year	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
1979	n/a	n/a	303,380	230,510	533,890
1980	n/a	n/a	298,360	229,870	528,230
1981	403,320	103,510	281,930	224,900	506,830
1982	n/a	n/a	274,310	224,690	499,000
1983	n/a	n/a	270,170	227,820	498,000
1984	392,930	107,520	271,680	228,770	500,450
1985	n/a	n/a	272,460	232,760	505,230
1986	n/a	n/a	267,700	234,030	501,730
1987	388,790	118,520	268,330	238,980	507,310
1988	n/a	n/a	273,230	247,380	520,610
1989	398,300	129,930	275,140	253,100	528,240
1990	n/a	n/a	281,030	261,960	542,990
1991	402,660	139,830	277,750	264,740	542,490
1992	n/a	n/a	276,530	268,530	545,060
1993	395,810	154,680	277,920	272,570	550,490
1994	398,710	161,670	281,170	279,200	560,370
1995	402,690	169,670	285,580	286,780	572,370
1996[2]	396,900	176,190	284,930	288,160	573,090

Notes:

[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

[2] The most recent figures available for 1996 are at June.

n/a= Full-time/part-time split not available.

September estimates will be published on 18 December 1996.

Source:

DED Census of Employment and Quarterly Employment Survey.

Spring and Mineral Water

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list *(a)* the number of contracts between Department of the Environment Services and suppliers of spring or mineral water, *(b)* the quantities of water involved in the last year for which figures are available and *(c)* the cost of supplying such water to Department of the Environment offices. [7469]

Mr. Moss: The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland currently has 15 contracts with suppliers for the provision of spring and mineral water to its offices and a number of other premises within the Northern Ireland civil service general office estate. In 1995–96, the last full year for which figures are available, 11,715 litres of water were supplied at a cost to the Department of £5,928.97.

Publicity

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much his Department has spent on promotional or public information campaigns in each of the last five years; and how much he estimates will be spent on these campaigns during the (i) current and (ii) next financial years. [7538]

Sir John Wheeler: The following is the information:

1991–92: £182,321

1992–93: £509,013

1993–94: £650,666

1994–95: £1,021,292

1995–96: £1,906,545

1996–97: £140,000 (estimate)

1997–98: £Nil (estimate)

Drug Seizures

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on drug seizures in Northern Ireland in 1996. [7592]

Sir John Wheeler: Up to 30 November 1996, the RUC has seized 70,931 ecstasy tablets, 147 kgs of cannabis resin, 5,871 gms of herbal cannabis, 2,116 LSD tablets, 13 kgs of amphetamines, 237 gms of cocaine, 137.5 gms and 1,175 tablets of opiates, including heroin. During the same period, Customs and Excise has seized 4,295 tablets of ecstasy, 10,044 kgs of cannabis resin, 43 gms of herbal cannabis, 120 gms of cannabis resin—space cake— one cannabis joint, 200 tablets of LSD, three amphetamine wraps, 2 gms of heroin and 3 gms of psilocin—magic mushrooms.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much his Department will spend on Christmas trees and decorations this year; how many Christmas trees will be bought for his Department's headquarters; and what are the type and country of origin of the trees. [7560]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* The Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments will spend £860 on 28 Christmas trees and various decorations. The trees will be of north American

large pole pines, Norway spruce, noble fir, silver fern and an artificial nordic spruce, originating from Northern Ireland, Scotland and China.

Health and Social Services Information

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list current circulars issued by the Department of Health and Social Services Management Executive to health and social services boards and health and social services trusts; and if he will update them in line with the exercise undertaken by the Department of Health in its local authority social services letter issued in Britain in July. [7744]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* A list follows of the circulars issued by the Department of Health and Social Services executive to health and social services boards and health and social services trusts since 1 January 1996. Information about circulars issued prior to this date could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The Department does not currently have a central list of all extant guidance but as part of the development of is communication strategy consideration will be given to this issue.

Number	*Date*	*Title*
TC7 7/95	8 January 1996	PTB staff pay for 1995–96 for MTO's ATOs MLSOs support grades dental auxiliaries and estate officer grades
TC7 8/95	8 January 1996	Part time hospital chaplains revised salaries for 1995–96
HPSS (PPRD4) 2/96	10 January 1996	Performance Tables 1995–96
TC1 1/96	10 January 1996	Nurses and midwives clinical grading Appeals—Revised Stage
TC7 9/95	12 January 1996	Hospital Pharmacies revised salaries for 1995–96
HSS(F)4/96	15 January 1996	External Financial Limited 1995–96 Brokerage
HSS(F)5/96	30 January 1996	Registration and Inspection of Residential Care Homes and Nursing Homes—Memorandum Trading Accounts
HSS(F)8/96	1 February 1996	Retrospective Employers Liability Claims
HSS(F)9/96	2 February 1996	Government loans to Health and Social Services (HSS)
HSS(F)6/96	7 February 1996	Statement of accounts (RMPA) 1996
HSS(F)11/96	11 February 1996	Charges for meals services in the community
HSS(F)12/96	12 February 1996	Public dividend capital payments
TC7 10/95	14 February 1996	Clinical Scientists and Hospital optometrists revised salaries for 1995–96
HSS(F)13/96	19 February 1996	Statement of accounts (CSA) for the year ended 31 March 1996
TC6 2/96	20 February 1996	Taxation treatment of motor car allowances
TC8 15/95	20 February 1996	Lodging charges for voluntary resident practitioners
TC6 1/96	21 February 1996	Revised circular on subsistence allowances out of pocket expenses and meal charges for resident staff etc.
HSS(F)1/96	28 February 1996	Statement of accounts (Trusts) for year ended 31 March 1996
HSS(F)2/96	28 February 1996	Statement of accounts (Boards) for year ended 31 March 1996
Supp 1	28 February 1996	
HSS(F)3/96	28 February 1996	Statement of accounts (GPFHS) for year ended 31 March 1996
TC7 11/95	28 February 1996	Speech and language therapists revised salaries for 1995–96
TC7 2/96	29 February 1996	Clinical psychologists trainee clinical psychologists and assistant psychologists revised salaries for 1995–96
TC8 4/96	4 March 1996	Specialist registrar establishments
HSS(F)7/96	12 March 1996	Statement of accounts for (NIBTS) 1996
TC6 3/96	12 March 1996	Revised motor car allowances
HSS(FHS)9/96	19 March 1996	Dental Charges (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996 (S.R. 1996 No. 106)
HSS(F)14/96	19 March 1996	Statement of Accounts (PGMDE) for the year ended 31 March 1996
TC8 6/96	22 March 1996	Implementing the reforms of specialist medical training
PRSC(PR) 1/96	25 March 1996	Implementation of New Complaints Procedure: Final Guidance
HSS(FHS)10/96	27 March 1996	Health Service Low Income Scheme
HSS(F)15/96	28 March 1996	Practice on the Audit of Central Government Sector Accounts
TC5 1/96	28 March 1996	Nurses and midwives pay for 1996–97
HSS(FHS)6/96	29 March 1996	GP Fundholding: Management and Computer Allowances
HSS9(FHS)7/96	29 March 1996	Optical Charges and Payments (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996 (S.R. 1996 No.124)
TC7 3/96	29 March 1996	Professionals allied to medicine and related grades of staff pay for 1996–97
HSS(F)14/96	30 March 1996	Supplement 1 statement of accounts (PGMDE) for the year end 31 March 1996
HSS(FHS)11/96	2 April 1996	General Dental Services (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996 (S.R. 1996 No. 114)
TC8 2/96	4 April 1996	Revised arrangements for the management of the employment contracts of doctors in training guidelines etc
HSS(FHS)13/96	5 April 1996	Changes to the GP Terms of Service— Transfer of out of hours responsibility and practice complaints procedures.
THR 1/96	5 April 1996	Supplement for teaching and research STAR 1996–97
TC3 1/96	15 April 1996	Increases in the National Rates of pay for Upholsters from January 1996.
TC7 3/96	18 April 1996	Corrigendum professions allied to medicine and related grades of staff pay for 1996–97
TC8 1/96	19 April 1996	Pay and conditions of service remuneration of hospital medical and dental staff and doctors in public health medicine and the community health service
HSS(FHS)17/96	22 April 1996	GP Fundholding: Identification, Approval and use of savings.
HSS(F)10/96	24 April 1996	Accounting for the cost of early retirement
PRSC(PR) 2/96	25 April 1996	HPSS Complaints Procedure—Training Resource Pack
TC1 2/96	25 April 1996	Offical Vehicle Users reimbursement of petrol costs
TC8 5/96	29 April 1996	Emergency care services
HSS(FHS) 14/96	30 April 1996	The Health and Personal Social Services (Amendment) (Northern Ireland Order 1995 (S.I. 1995 No.2704 (NI 14)
TC8 3/96	1 May 1996	Terms and conditions of service for the specialist registrar grade
THR2/96	4 May 1996	Management costs on NHS Trusts
HSS(F)16/96	14 May 1996	Report by the Comptroller and auditor general: Inquiry Commissioned by the NHS Chief Executive into matters concerning the former Yorkshire Regional Health Authority
HSS(FHS)22/96	15 May 1996	Health Service Low Income Scheme New Publicity Material
TC4 1/96	20 May 1996	Ancillary staff pay and conditions of service
TC3 2/96	21 May 1996	Pay settlement wef 1 April 1996 common grading structure staff, planner estimators and building trade operatives pay and conditions of service

Number	Date	Title
TC6 4/96	21 May 1996	Revised rates of pay 1996 settlement for assistant directors of social services (protected) and all other social services staff up to principal social worker. Also increase to sleeping in and standby duty allowanees.
HSS(FHS)23/96	23 May 1996	The health and Personal Social Services (Fundholding Practices) Amendment Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1996
TC7 5/96	24 May 1996	Speech and Language therapists and speech and language therapists assistants pay for 1996–97
TC8 13/95	28 May 1996	Hospital Medical and Dental Staff: Category 1 and 2 work, treatment of earnings from work outside the principal contract of employment
HSS(F)18/96	29 May 1996	Accounts for the year ended 31 March 1996 (National Board)
HSS(F)18/96	29 May 1996	Supplement 1 changes to format of accounts
HSS(FHS)25/96	30 May 1996	Local Pharmacy Budgets—1996–97
TC2 1/96	31 May 1996	Administrative and Clerical Staff 1996 Pay Settlement
HSS(F)6/96	3 June 1996	Supplement 1 statement of accounts (RMPA) for year ended 31 March 1996
HSS(F)7/96	3 June 1996	Supplement 1 statement of accounts (NIBTS) for year ended 31 March 1996
HSS(F)14/96	3 June 1996	Supplement 2 statement of accounts (PGMDE) for year ended 31 March 1996
HSS(F)10/96	4 June 1996	Supplement 1 accounting for the cost of early retirement
HSS(F)10/96	4 June 1996	Supplement 2 accounting for the cost of early retirement
HSS(F)13/96	10 June 1996	Supplement 1 statement of accounts (CSA) for the year ended 31 March 1996
TC1 3/96	10 June 1996	Official Vehicle Users reimbursement of petrol costs
TC7 4/96	10 June 1996	PTB staff pay for 1996–97 for MTOs ATos MLSos support grade dental auxiliaries and estate officer grades
HSS(FHS)21/96	12 June 1996	GP Deprivation Payments Scheme
HSS(F)10/96	12 June 1996	Supplement 3 accounting for the cost of early retirement
TC7 1/96	12 June 1996	Speech and language therapists post qualification training and continuing professional development and the use of grade 3 posts
HSS(F)18/96	13 June 1996	Supplement 2 statement of accounts for the year ended 31 March
HSS(FHS)16/96	14 June 1996	General Medical Services—Continuity of care for patients and financial arrangements for GPs during periods of suspension by direction of the tribunal
HSS(F)7/96	14 June 1996	Supplement 2 statement of accounts (NIBTS) for year ended 31 March 1996
TC7 6/96	14 June 1996	Clinical psychologists trainee clinical psychologists and assistant psychologists pay 1996–97
THR3/96	24 June 1996	Public announcement
TC7 7/96	26 June 1996	Hospitals Pharmacists Pay for 1996–97
THR4/96	27 June 1996	HPSS (Residual liabilities) (NI) Order 1996
HSS(SC)1/96	28 June 1996	The Commissioning and Provision of Maternity Services Policy Guidelines
TC7 8/96	1 July 1996	Clinical Scientists and Hospital Optometrists Pay 1996–97
TC4 2/96	10 July 1996	Pay Settlement 1996–97—Care Assistants, Home helps and Wardens
HSS(SC)2/96	24 July 1996	The developing of multiprofessional funding of audit projects
TC1 4/96	26 July 1996	Official Vehicle Users reimbursement of petrol costs
PRSC(PR)3/96	30 July 1996	Charter for Patients and Clients
TC6 5/96	9 August 1996	Salary increases—directors of social services deputy director of social services (Eastern Board) and assistant directors of social services effective from 1 July 1996
HSS(F)22/96	15 August 1996	Performance Assessment and Monitoring System
HSS(FHS) 29/96	16 August 1996	Pharmacists Remuneration 1996–97
PRSC1/96	21 August 1996	New Arrangements for Extra-Contractual Referrals to Providers in GB
TC1 7/96	21 August 1996	Administrative and Clerical/professional and Technical revised stage III procedures
TC7 10/96	21 August 1996	Part-time Hospital Chaplins
PRSC2/96	22 August 1996	Establishing Area of Residence
PRSC(PR) 4/96	16 September 1996	Charter for Maternity Services
HSS(F)19/96	17 September 1996	Management letters and internal control reports for Trusts 1994–95
TC1 8/96	17 September 1996	Official vehicles users—reimbursement of petrol costs
TC7 9/96	18 September 1996	National Framework Agreement PAMS Specific Issues
HSS(F)23/96	19 September 1996	Management letters and internal control reports for Boards 1994–95
METL1/96	20 September 1996	1996–97 contracts—service reductions
TC1 9/96	24 September 1996	Official vehicle users—reimbursement of petrol costs
HSS(F)20/96	30 September 1996	Use of management consultants
HSS(F)24/96	1 October 1996	Interindebtedness arrangements 1996–97
HSS(FHS) 34/96	4 October 1996	Health Service Low Income Scheme
TC1 10/96	10 October 1996	Official Vehicle Users—reimbursement of petrol costs
THR5/96	18 October 1996	STAR/SUMDE 1996–97
HSS(F)25/96	23 October 1996	Accounting cost of early retirement national board for nursing midwifery and health visiting Northern Ireland
PRSC(PR)5/96	25 October 1996	Video on New Complaints Procedure
HSSE(OCE)1/96	31 October 1996	Code of practice on openness in the HPSS
HSS(SC)3/96	1 November 1996	Retention of Personal Health Records
THR6/96	1 November 1996	Disposal of vehicles withdrawn from service
TC5 2/96	12 November 1996	Senior Nurses and midwives pay for 1995–96
METL2/96	26 November 1996	Flying of flags
TC1 5/96	12 August 1997	Official Vehicles users reimbursement of Petrol costs
TC1 6/97	2 September 1997	Holiday in 1997

Social Services (Assessment of Need)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by board and trade the number of assessments of need for non-residential social services support undertaken by health and social services trusts and health and social services boards in 1994 and 1995 under (i) section 3 of the Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1989, (ii) section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons (Northern Ireland) Act 1978, (iii) relevant sections of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 and (iv) other relevant enactments governing assessment for non-residential social services support. [7750]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* Information on assessments is not available in the form requested.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Vicarages and Palaces (Security)

33. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, how much was spent on security of vicarages and bishops' palaces in each of the past three years in real terms; how many buildings were involved in each year; what were the principal measures involved; and if he will make a statement. [6532]

Mr. Alison: The provision of security measures for parsonage houses and suffragan bishops' houses is the responsibility of dioceses, which have done much in recent years to improve matters. The commissioners offer advice and this is currently under review.

The commissioners are responsible for see houses and have put in hand security measures which are appropriate to the individual properties and the personal circumstances of the bishop, his family and staff. Such measures also meet the stringent requirements of the commissioners' insurers. Measures include the installation of integrated fire and intruder alarm systems. Detailed figures are not available, but I can assure my hon. Friend that this important work is properly funded.

Property Holdings

35. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby representing the Church Commissioners, what discussions the Church Commissioners have had with the Charity Commission about the reduction in value of the Church Commission's property portfolio, and if he will make a statement. [6534]

Mr. Alison: In the three years to 1995, the commissioners' United Kingdom property portfolio achieved a total return of 17.9 per cent. per annum and they were the best performing fund of all those measured by the Investment Property Databank. In the 10 years to 1995, the return averaged 9.1 per cent which was slightly ahead of that recorded by the WM all-funds index.

The Church Commissioners are not subject to control by the Charity Commission, although meetings are held from time to time on matters of mutual interest.

WALES

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of children educated at *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools are in grant-maintained schools. [7237]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: As at January 1996 *(a)* 0.4 per cent. and *(b)* 4.9 per cent.

Hospital and Ward Closures

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hospital and ward closures there have been in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* Clwyd between 1979 and 1995. [5557]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The available information is given in the following table:

	1979	*1994–95*
Clwyd		
In-patient cases	47,741	73,906
Day cases	7,966	34,446
In-patient and day cases	55,707	108,352
New out-patients	57,182	83,165
Hospitals[1]	28	20
Wards[2]	—	—
Wales		
In-patient cases	349,695	513,417
Day cases	31,179	239,980
In-patient and day cases	380,874	753,397
New out-patients	428,739	638,275
Hospitals[1]	173	143
Wards[2]	—	—

[1] Hospitals are not directly comparable. 1994–95 figures include NHS trusts which comprise one or more hospitals that was previously counted separately.
[2] Information on wards is not collected centrally.

Pupil Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children there are currently in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools. [7239]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: As at January 1996, in local education authority maintained and grant maintained schools *(a)* 292,206 and *(b)* 198,503.

Beaches

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of Sate for Wales if he will list those beaches which *(a)* passed and *(b)* failed the UK mandatory coliform standard for bathing waters in 1996. [7449]

Mr. Hague: Compliance in 1996 of bathing waters in Wales identified under the EC bathing water directive (76/160/EEC) with the directive's mandatory standards for total coliforms and faecal coliforms was as follows:

	Pass/Fail
Jacksons Bay, Barry	Fail
Whitmore Bay, Barry	Pass
Cold Knap, Barry	Pass
Southerndown	Pass
Trecco Bay, Porthcawl	Pass
Sandy Bay, Porthcawl	Pass
Rest Bay, Porthcawl	Pass
Aberafan	Pass
Swansea Bay	Fail
Bracelet Bay	Pass
Limeslade Bay	Pass
Langland Bay	Pass
Caswell Bay	Pass
Oxwich Bay	Pass
Port Eynon Bay	Pass

	Pass/Fail
Rhossili	Pass
Pembrey	Pass
Pendine	Pass
Amroth	Pass
Saundersfoot	Pass
Tenby North	Pass
Tenby South	Pass
Broadhaven	Pass
Newgale	Pass
Whitesands	Pass
Newport	Pass
Poppit Sands	Pass
Aberporth	Pass
Tresaith	Pass
Traeth Gwyn, New Quay	Pass
Aberystwyth South	Pass
Aberystwyth North	Pass
Borth	Pass
Aberdyfi	Fail
Tywyn	Pass
Fairbourne	Pass
Barmouth	Pass
Tal-y-bont	Pass
Dyffryn (Llanerdwyn)	Pass
Llandanwg	Pass
Harlech	Fail
Morfa Bychan	Pass
Criccieth	Pass
Pwllheli	Pass
Abersoch	Pass
Morfa Dinlle	Fass
Rhosneigr	Pass
Trearddur Bay	Pass
Benllech	Pass
Penmaenmawr	Pass
Llandudno West Shore	Pass
Llandudno North Shore	Pass
Colwyn Bay	Pass
Kinmel Bay (Sandy Cove)	Pass
Rhyl	Pass
Prestatyn	Pass

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those beaches in Wales which have been tested for enterovirus in 1996; and in each case if the beach passed the enterovirus standard in the EU bathing water directive. [7432]

Mr. Hague: The information is as follows:

Waters sampled for enterovirus	*Pass/Fail EC Standard (of zero)*
Jacksons Bay, Barry	Fail
Swansea Bay	Pass
Aberdyfi	Pass
Borth	Pass
Harlech	Pass
Morfa Bychan	Pass
Benllech	Pass
Rhosneigr	Pass
Penmaenmawr	Pass
Llandudno West Shore	Fail
Colwyn Bay	Fail
Kinmel Bay (Sandy Cove)	Pass
Rhyl	Pass

Publicity

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what promotional and public information campaigns his Department is *(a)* currently running and *(b)* planning to run during the next six months; and for each campaign (i) how much it will cost, (1) in total and (2) to his Department, (ii) what agencies or bodies are undertaking the work and (iii) what is its planned duration. [7410]

Mr. Hague: My Department is currently running the following promotional and public information campaigns, which include advertising:

	Total cost to my Department £	*Agencies*	*Duration*
Nursery Education Voucher Scheme[1]	80,000	COI Capita	1996–97
Christmas Drink Drive[1]	21,500	COI	3–31 December 1996

[1] These campaigns will run concurrently with those promoted in England by the Department for Education and Employment, and the Department of Transport.

I plan to run the following campaign in the next six months:

	Total cost to my Department £	*Agencies*	*Duration*
Child Road Safety[1]	19,000	COI	Approximately four weeks from 14 January 1997

[1] These campaigns will run concurrently with those promoted in England by the Department for Education and Employment, and the Department of Transport.

Publicity plans for the 1997–98 financial year have not yet been finalised.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his Department has spent on promotional or public information campaigns in each of the last five years; and how much he estimates will be spent on these campaigns during the (i) current and (ii) next financial years. [7537]

Mr. Hague: In the current financial year, I estimate my Department will spend £300,000 on promotional and public information campaigns which involve advertising.

For previous financial years, comparable information is not readily available and can be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Publicity plans for the 1997–98 financial year have not yet been finalised, and decisions about future years' activity will be considered thereafter.

Dental Services

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* children, *(b)* adults and *(c)* people in total were registered with dentists in each health authority in Wales in (i) February 1993, (ii) July 1993, (iii) February 1994, (iv) July 1994, (v) February 1995, (vi) July 1995 and (vii) February 1996; and if he will make a statement. [7485]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 19 April 1996, *Official Report*, column *634*.

Hospital Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what have been the numbers of admissions into each hospital accident and emergency department in Wales; and what these figures are as a percentage of the busiest in the last year for which figures are available. [8014]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on the number of new attendances at each accident and emergency department or casualty unit in Wales during 1995–96 and the percentage this represented of the attendances at the largest unit is given in the following table:

Attendances in accident and emergency departments/casualty units, 1995–96

NHS Trust and Hospital	*New attendances*	*As a percentage of the largest unit*[1]
Bridgend and District		
Maesteg General	571	0.7
Princess of Wales	48,511	56.7
Carmarthen and District		
Llandovery	1,264	1.5
West Wales General	19,067	22.3
Ceredigion and Mid Wales		
Aberaeron	396	0.5
Bronglais General	12,929	15.1
Cardigan and District	1,374	1.6
Tregaron	153	0.2
Clwydian Community Care		
Colwyn Bay Community	1,287	1.5
Denbigh Community	2,930	3.4
Flint Community	3,950	4.6
Holywell Community	6,626	7.7
Llangollen Community	1,363	1.6
Mold Community	9,724	11.4
Royal Alexandra	1,287	1.5
Ruthin Community	1,953	2.3
Glan Clwyd Hospital		
H M Stanley	2,966	3.5
Ysbyty Glan Clwyd	40,564	47.4
Glan Hafren		
Aberbargoed and District	1,499	1.8
Caerphilly District Miners	12,504	14.6
Chepstow Community	3,971	4.6
County	5,705	6.7
Redwood Memorial	1,039	1.2
Royal Gwent	66,652	77.9
Glan-y-Mor		
Neath General	26,971	31.5
Gwynedd Community		
Bronygarth	2,885	3.4
Bryn Beryl	2,070	2.4
Dolgellau and Barmouth	2,173	2.5
Ffestiniog Memorial	2,017	2.4
Penrhos Stanley	316	0.4
Tywyn and District	2,400	2.8
Valley	4,352	5.1
Gwynedd Hospitals		
Llandudno	12,823	15.0
Ysbyty Gwynedd	27,118	31.7
East Glamorgan		
East Glamorgan General	29,513	34.5
Llandough		
Barry Community	1,501	1.8
The Barry Hospital	4,157	4.9
Llanelli Dinefwr		
Prince Philip	32,168	37.6
Morriston Hospital		
Morriston	55,727	65.2
Nevill Hall and District		
Blaenavon Health Care	1,696	2.0
Blaina and District	987	1.2
Ebbw Vale	1,891	2.2
Monmouth General	1,389	1.6
Nevill Hall	36,991	43.3
Tredegar General	2,684	3.1
North Glamorgan		
Aberdare	8,432	9.9
Mountain Ash	6,103	7.1
Prince Charles	40,068	46.9
Pembrokeshire		
South Pembrokeshire	6,667	7.8
Tenby Cottage	4,135	4.8
Withybush	20,366	23.8
Powys Health Care		
Breconshire War Memorial	7,965	9.3
Broddyfi Community	2,192	2.6
Builth Wells Cottage	3,260	3.8
Llandrindod Wells	4,735	5.5
Llanidloes and District	1,442	1.7
Montgomery County Infirmary	4,320	5.1
Victoria Memorial	3,968	4.6
Ystradgynlais Community	2,646	3.1
Rhondda Health Care		
Llwynpia	16,778	19.6
Swansea		
Singleton	29,187	34.1
UHW Healthcare		
Cardiff Royal Infirmary	85,524	100.0
University Hospital of Wales	520	0.6
Wrexham Maelor Hospital		
Wrexham Maelor	43,976	51.4

[1] Largest in terms of the number of new attendances (Cardiff Royal Infirmary).

South East Wales Ambulance Trust

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many single-manned journeys have been made by ambulance in 1996 in the South East Wales ambulance trust region; and if he will make a statement. [7726]

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not available centrally.

NHS Trust Directors

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which non-executive directors appointed to health service trusts in Wales at the time of their establishment are still in office. [7493]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested has been placed in the Library of the House.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Central Science Laboratory

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the future of the Central Science Laboratory. [8649]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Government have decided that, for the present, the Central Science Laboratory should remain as executive agency of MAFF. This will allow the CSL to consolidate its business following relocation to the new laboratory at Sand Hutton and to build on the links already established with the university of York and York bioscience initiative.

CSL's food science laboratory is to remain at Norwich and will continue to develop its collaboration with other institutes on the Norwich research park and with the university of East Anglia.

We must ensure that maximum value is obtained from the excellent new facilities at Sand Hutton. We will therefore be appointing specialists from the commercial sector to advise us on how best to achieve a secure future for CSL.

Beef Imports

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to introduce the same controls in respect of beef imports from non-EC countries as are placed on home produced beef. [6987]

Mrs. Browning: The Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) (No. 2) Regulations 1996 as amended, prohibit the sale for human consumption of any meat derived from bovine animals aged over 30 months and slaughtered on or after 29 March 1996, whether in the UK or overseas. The only exceptions are for bovine meat from non-EC countries specified in the regulations where the Government are satisfied that we can import beef without risk, and from animals slaughtered for human consumption under the beef assurance scheme.

Additionally, all consignments of fresh meat imported into the United Kingdom, whether from other member states or third countries, must have been produced in accordance with harmonised Community rules laid down in Council directive 64/433/EEC, as amended.

As regards controls on specified bovine materials, the Commission has recently put a proposal for EU-wide controls on such material to the Standing Veterinary Committee. This would also place equivalent controls on imports from third countries. The proposal was only supported only by the UK and France and is now expected to be submitted to the Council of Agriculture Ministers for further consideration.

Butter

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has taken to protect the interests of consumers of spreadable butter; and what representations he has made to the European Commission on this matter. [7273]

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave him on 19 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *474*, and on 4 December 1996 *Official Report*, column *721*.

BSE

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent assessment he has made of the accuracy of the data on his Department's Internet site relating to the selective cull of cattle not over 30 months under the BSE eradication scheme. [8183]

Mr. Baldry: The Department is conscious of the importance of having accurate information across its Internet site which has until recently been available on the CCTA Government Information Service. However, during the past month we have been phasing in a dedicated MAFF service on the Internet (http://www.maff.gov.uk); this service is now fully available and contains fresh sources of information. We are also reviewing all MAFF's BSE documentation on the Internet with the aim of enhancing its content, currency and structure.

Genetically Modified Products

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the effects of using genetically manipulated (i) soya beans and (ii) other products in food production; and if he will publish his Department's conclusions. [8185]

Mrs Browning: No research has been specifically commissioned on soya beans or other genetically manipulated food products although the Department funds generic work worth some £800,000 per year to underpin its safety assessment procedures. In the course of assessing individual foods, the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes evaluates extensive safety data. The committee's findings are published in its annual report, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Peanut Products

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made towards Euro-labelling standards for peanut products. [6631]

Mrs. Browning: The EC Scientific Committee for Food has reported on the subject of food intolerance. The Standing Committee for Foodstuffs and the Codex Committee on Food Labelling discussed the problem at meetings earlier this year. We expect a Commission working group to consider the outcome and any necessary labelling rules.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if an ovine animal with the attached ear tag FO2873, was certified as fit to travel during the 24-hour period preceding the loading on to vehicles for a sailing on 22 November. [7735]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 5 December 1996]:* It is not possible to tell. FO2873 would be only part of the full identification mark applied to the ovine animal. The mark applied to exported sheep also includes an individual animal identification number.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of live sheep exported between 31 May and 1 November were destined for further fattening. [7737]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 5 December 1996]:* The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the *(a)* planned expenditure in 1996–97 following the 1995 expenditure settlement, *(b)* estimated outturn expenditure in 1996–97 and *(c)* planned expenditure in 1997–98 in respect of each of the environmentally sensitive areas. [7689]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 5 December 1996]:* Estimated outturn expenditure for 1996–97 is as follows:

	£ million
Pennine Dales	3.166
South Downs	1.936
Somerset Levels and Moors	2.808
Broads	3.110
West Penwith	0.526
Breckland	0.812
Suffolk River Valleys	1.488
Clun	0.991
North Peak	1.458
Test Valley	0.145
North Kent Marshes	0.792
Avon Valley	0.179
South Wessex Downs	0.752
Exmoor	1.720
South West Peak	1.539
Lake District	5.730
Blackdown Hills	0.361
Cotswold Hills	2.068
Dartmoor	0.861
Essex Coast	0.350
Shropshire Hills	0.509
Upper Thames Tributaries	0.502
Total	31.803

The financial provision for environmentally sensitive areas is as follows:

1996–97(1995 PES provision): £37.02 million

1997–98(1996 PES provision): £33.69 million

The financial provision is not allocated between individual ESAs.

All figures relate to payments to farmers in English ESAs.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much his Department plans to spend on celebrating Christmas and the new year. [7576]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* I estimate that my Department will be spending just under £3,000 on celebrating Christmas and the new year.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Servants (Impartiality)

8. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent consultations he has had with the Cabinet Secretary concerning regulations protecting the political neutrality of the civil service during pre-election periods. [6502]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie).

Deregulation (Competition)

13. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what countries he has visited for the purpose of studying *(a)* deregulation and *(b)* competition policy. [6509]

Mr. Freeman: I have sought support for reducing the burden of European legislation from Ministers and business leaders in most EU member states. Working with our European partners for better EC legislation is vital for improving the competitiveness of UK business.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement about the impact of deregulation upon the competitive position of the British economy. [6516]

Mr. Freeman: The Government's commitment to fewer, better and simpler regulations is making a key contribution to the UK's competitiveness. Deregulation measures are now saving business hundreds of millions of pounds each year and helping to attract increasing investment from overseas.

Deregulation (Safety Implications)

14. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the effect on safety at work of deregulation. [6512]

Mr. Freeman: Changes are being made which will simplify and clarify the law without reducing necessary standards. These stem from the Health and Safety Commission's own review of regulation.

Civil Servants (Numbers)

15. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister by what percentage the number of civil servants has changed in the past five years. [6513]

Mr. Willetts: On 1 October 1991, there were 567,000 civil servants. There are now 487,000, a fall of 14 per cent.

Government Policy

16. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what was the principal Government policy with which he was concerned in the week beginning 2 December. [6514]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have continued to work on a full range of those Government policies for which I am responsible.

Policy Co-ordination

17. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the mechanisms for the co-ordination of Government (i) European, (ii) economic and (iii) education policy since his appointment. [6515]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Cabinet Committee structure is regularly reviewed to ensure that it facilitates the successful co-ordination of Government business.

Deregulation (Fiches d'impact)

19. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations the deregulation unit at his Department has made to the Commission about the content of the fiches d'impact. [6517]

Mr. Freeman: It is vital that the European Commission accurately assesses the costs to business of European legislative proposals. On 29 October 1996, I wrote to the Secretary General of the Commission and to Commissioners setting out the improvements the UK wants to see in the fiche d'impact assessment system. A copy of the paper I sent has been placed in the Library of the House.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing and Council Tax Benefits

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have received *(a)* extended housing benefit and *(b)* extended council tax benefit when leaving (i) income support and (ii) jobseeker's allowance; and what is his estimate of the cost in each case. [6729]

Mr. Roger Evans: Information concerning the number of people who have received an extended payment of housing benefit and council tax benefit will be available early next year. Information on the number of recipients who left income support or jobseeker's allowance and the cost in each case is not collected.

Benefit Recipients

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for *(a)* incapacity benefit, *(b)* disability living allowance and *(c)* the jobseeker's allowance, the 10 United Kingdom parliamentary constituencies with the highest number of recipients and the 10 with the lowest number, together with the two Northern Ireland constituencies with the highest number and the two with the lowest, stating for each constituency the percentage of the electorate who are recipients. [7204]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

For information on Northern Ireland constituencies, I refer the hon. and learned Member to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Norther Ireland.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many decisions on an initial award of *(a)* disability living allowance care component and *(b)* disability living allowance mobility component were made where the adjudication officer (i) required an examining medical officer's report, (ii) required a general practitioner's factual report, (iii) required other evidence and (iv) relied on the claim pack alone, in (1) 1992–93, (2) 1993–94, (3) 1994–95 and (4) 1995–96. [6723]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is in the table:

	Claim pack alone[1]	*GP's factual report*	*Examination medical officer's report*	*Any other evidence*	*Total*
1992–93[2]					
Care component	141,838	55,107	47,920	7,165	252,030
Mobility component	157,381	64,092	56,177	8,932	286,582
1993–94[2]					
Care component	67,671	48,841	33,141	6,323	155,976
Mobility component	72,190	55,203	38,664	6,729	172,786
1994–95					
Care component	67,085	60,841	31,522	9,325	168,773
Mobility component	70,481	68,919	35,793	9,633	184,826
1995–96					
Care component	62,770	70,083	41,425	11,430	185,708
Mobility component	62,176	78,331	45,997	11,075	197,579

Source:
Analytical Services Division: 100 per cent.

Notes:
[1] Claims for disability living allowance, care and/or mobility components are decided in the light of all the evidence. The claim pack also invites a claimant to provide supporting statements from someone who knows how their disability affects their every day life e.g. from a doctor or social worker.
[2] Includes top-up awards.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people during the past year have claimed the disability living allowance mobility component where the adjudication officer considered a claim for the higher rate; in how many cases claims were decided by *(a)* a general practitioner's factual report and *(b)* an examining practitioner's report; and how many claims have been refused. [6724]

Mr. Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Awards of higher rate mobility component

GP's factual report	*Examining medical practitioner's report*	*Any other evidence*	*Total*	*All refusal*
57,499	39,746	51,542	148,787	255,281

Source:
Analytical Services Division: 100 per cent.
Note:
Claims for disability living allowance are considered for the whole benefit rather than for a particular component and rate of award, using all of the evidence.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for disability living allowance were received in *(a)* 1994–95 and 1995–96. [6736]

Mr. Mitchell: The information is in the table.

Claims for disability living allowance

Years	*Number (thousands)*
1994–95	504
1995–96	511

Source:
Analytical Service Division: 100 per cent. data.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost of disregarding in full a partner's *(a)* income and *(b)* capital, in the calculation of disability working allowance; how many people would benefit; and how many new claimants would be (i) men and (ii) women. [6728]

Mr. Mitchell: None. There is insufficient information on which to base a reliable estimate.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women receive disability living allowance but have no income maintenance benefit in payment. [6730]

Mr. Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Recipients of disability living allowance

	August 1996
	Number
All persons	1,768,000
Men	905,000
Women	863,000

Source:
Analytical Services Division: 5 per cent. data.
Note:
Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Committees (Membership)

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many members he has appointed to serve on *(a)* the Social Security Advisory Committee, *(b)* the Industrial Injuries Advisory Committee and *(c)* the Council on Tribunals; and how many are (i) woman, (ii) disabled and (iii) of ethnic minority origin. [6726]

Mr. Burt: The information is as follows:

Social security advisory committee

Women	*Disabled*	*Of ethnic minority origin*
6	2	2

Total members appointed = 22.

Industrial injuries advisory council

Women	*Disabled*	*Of ethnic minority origin*
8	Not available	0

Total members appointed = 24.

Council on tribunals[1]

Women	*Disabled*	*Of ethnic minority origin*
1	0	0

Notes: Total members appointed = 10.
Figures are from 9 April 1992 to date.
Source:
[1] Lord Chancellor's Department.

Benefits Agency (Automatic Payments)

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what report he has received from the Benefits Agency on the consequences of the failure of its automatic credit transfer system to maintain payment of benefits. [6628]

Mr. Roger Evans: Briefing as events occurred was received by Ministers.

Cold Weather Payments Scheme

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received regarding the cold weather payments scheme. [7696]

Mr. Roger Evans: Since 4 November, there have been four letters—all from hon. Members.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost to his Department of the cold weather payments scheme in each year since it was introduced. [7695]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table:

Year	*Expenditure*[1] *(£000s)*
1986–87	10,200
1987–88	500
1988–89	3
1989–90	400
1990–91	8,600
1991–92	23,000
1992–93	15,000
1993–94	12,400

Year	Expenditure[1] (£000s)
1994–95	77,000
1995–96	62,000
1996–97[2]	148,104

[1] Figures rounded to nearest thousand.
[2] From 4 November 1996.

Pensions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of people who opted out of *(a)* the state earnings-related pension scheme and *(b)* occupational pension schemes in favour of private personal pension schemes and who have made no further contributions to the private schemes since the year in which they opted out. [7494]

Mr. Heald: The available information is in the table.

The table indicates the number of people who had an appropriate personal pension scheme at the end of 1994–95, where the Department has made a minimum contribution payment into the individual's APP in the first year of the scheme, and then made no further payments. The figures are broken down into the previous type of pension scheme.

Number of people with a minimum contribution in the first year of the APP but none in subsequent years

United Kingdom *Thousands*

Pension scheme type year before APP start	Start year of APP 1987–88	1988–89	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Total	16	7	37	36	30	24	16
SERPS only	13	4	26	27	22	18	12
Occupational pension	1	1	3	2	2	1	1
Mixed: SERPS and occupational pension	—	—	3	2	2	1	2
Other APP	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Other	2	2	5	5	4	2	2

Source: 1 per cent. sample of national insurance records taken at February 1996.
Notes:
1. — = Nil or negligible.
2. APP = Appropriate personal pension.
3. Minimum contribution—a proportion of national insurance contributions paid into an APP by the DSS.
4. Qualification for SERPS is defined as having earnings over the lower earnings limit in the year.
5. "Other" will include those receiving NI credits, paying class 2 contributions, class 3 contributions, new entrants (i.e. at 16 years old), and any combinations of categories.
6. Because all figures are rounded to the nearest thousand, the sum of the amounts in the individual columns may not agree with the amount shown against the total.

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those Organisations for Economic Co-operation and Development countries other than the United Kingdom which place geographical limitations on the payment of fully uprated retirement pensions to citizens who have contributed to a state contributory pension scheme. [8187]

Mr. Heald: On the basis of the information available to the Department, none.

However, other forms of restriction on payment outside national territories are practised by some other OECD countries.

Disability Access Rights Advice Service

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the introduction of the disability access rights advice service; and what is its estimated annual cost. [7757]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) on 6 November, *Official Report*, column *547*.

National Insurance

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 21 November, *Official Report*, columns *598–600*, on national insurance, what estimate he has made of the administrative costs additional to national insurance benefit expenditure for *(a)* flat-rate retirement pensions, *(b)* additional pensions and *(c)* other benefits for the years (i) 1995–96, (ii) 2000–01, (iii) 2010–11, (iv) 2020–21 and (v) 2030–31 if the administrative costs incurred in 1995–96 applied proportionately in subsequent years. [7934]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

National insurance fund administration costs

£ billion in 1994–95 benefit rate terms

1994–95	2000–01	2010–11	2020–21	2030–31
1.60	1.46	1.69	1.96	2.28

Source:
Government Actuary's report on the third quinquennial review under section 137 of the Social Security Act 1975 (HC 160).

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 19 November, *Official Report*, columns *519–21*, what was the total contribution income at 1995–96 prices from *(a)* employees, *(b)* self-employed and *(c)* employers; and what were the sums (i) paid by the Treasury, (ii) from the national insurance surcharge and class 1A for cars and fuel and (iii) from other sources, in (1) cash and (2) as a percentage of the total, in each year from 1979–80 to 1995–96. [7935]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

	1979–80		1980–81		1981–82		1982–83	
	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.
Total income	44.83	—	45.71	—	44.31	—	45.07	—
Class 1[1]: Employees	11.06	24.67	11.45	25.04	12.84	28.97	15.35	34.06
Employers	17.73	39.56	17.92	39.20	17.09	38.57	17.67	39.21
Class 1A	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Class 2/4 (self-employed)	0.70	1.55	0.67	1.46	0.74	1.66	0.85	1.89
NI surcharge[2]	7.60	16.96	7.61	16.64	7.25	16.37	4.98	11.04
Treasury payment	6.03	13.46	6.32	13.83	4.83	10.90	4.81	10.67
Other sources[3]	1.70	3.80	1.75	3.83	1.57	3.54	1.41	3.13

	1983–84		1984–85		1985–86		1986–87	
	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.
Total income	44.24	—	42.76	—	42.48	—	43.80	—
Class 1[1]: Employees	16.34	36.94	16.68	39.01	17.91	42.15	17.72	40.44
Employers	18.35	41.48	18.65	43.62	19.63	46.21	20.85	47.60
Class 1A	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Class 2/4 (self-employed)	0.98	2.21	1.05	2.45	1.05	2.48	1.08	2.47
NI surcharge[2]	3.05	6.90	1.50	3.51	0.06	0.15	0.02	0.04
Treasury payment	4.99	11.27	4.39	10.26	3.44	8.11	3.72	8.50
Other sources[3]	0.53	1.20	0.49	1.14	0.38	0.90	0.42	0.95

	1987–88		1988–89		1989–90		1990–91	
	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.
Total income	45.08	—	46.41	—	44.77	—	44.49	—
Class 1[1]: Employees	18.66	41.40	19.49	42.00	18.69	41.75	16.90	37.98
Employers	22.21	49.27	23.75	51.18	24.88	55.57	24.78	55.70
Class 1A	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Class 2/4 (self-employed)	1.14	2.54	1.29	2.78	1.36	3.05	1.34	3.01
NI surcharge[2]	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Treasury payment	3.18	7.05	2.31	4.98	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Other sources[3]	–0.12	–0.26	–0.43	–0.94	–0.17	–0.38	1.47	3.30

	1991–92		1992–93		1993–94		1994–95	
	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.	£ billions	Per cent.
Total income	44.16	—	44.00	—	52.76	—	52.34	—
Class 1[1]: Employees	16.88	38.22	16.65	37.85	16.93	32.09	18.63	35.59
Employers	24.63	55.76	24.34	55.32	24.89	47.18	24.52	46.84
Class 1A	0.00	0.00	0.48	1.10	0.45	0.86	0.50	0.96
Class 2/4 (self-employed)	1.32	3.00	1.34	3.04	1.50	2.84	1.50	2.87
NI surcharge[2]	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Treasury payment	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	8.19	15.52	6.59	12.59
Other sources[3]	1.33	3.02	1.18	2.69	0.80	1.51	0.60	1.14

[1] Gross of statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay deductions.
[2] The NI surcharge was part of general taxation and not paid into the national insurance fund.
[3] Figures take into account deductions made by employers in respect of statutory sick pay (SSP) from April 1983 and statutory maternity pay (SMP) from April 1987. The combined SSP and SMP deductions between 1987–88 and 1989–90 exceed other sources of income. From April 1990 figures include amounts paid from the Consolidated Fund as compensation for SSP and SMP deductions.
1. National Insurance contribution figures include the NHS element.
2. Figures may not sum due to rounding.
3. Figures are in 1995–96 prices.

Child Support

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many inspectors have been appointed by him since 5 April to investigate child support cases involving self-employed absent parents. [8122]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a breakdown by ethnic origin of parents with care against whom reduced benefit directions were issued in 1995–96. [8125]

Mr. Mitchell: The information is not available.

Child Poverty

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Secuirty if he will update his answer of 19 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *1118–19*, giving the number of children in families who are *(a)* dependent on income support and *(b)* in receipt of family credit, by region. [8182]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Income support

	May 1995	November 1995	February 1996
Great Britain	2,958	2,942	2,956
South East (excluding London)	417	420	—
London (inner and outer)	519	515	—
North	184	183	—
Wales	171	168	—
Scotland	246	246	—
Yorkshire and Humberside	270	265	—
East Midlands	188	187	—
East Anglia	80	81	—
South West	179	180	—
West Midlands	304	298	—
North West	401	400	—

Family credit

	May 1995	November 1995	February 1996
Great Britain	1,141	1,219	1,248

Notes:

1. All figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand and are given in thousands.
2. The regions shown are the Government Statistical Service standard regions.
3. A Government Statistical Service regional breakdown is not yet available for family credit or for February 1996 income support.
4. Children have been defined as being aged 15 or under.

Sources:

1. Income support statistics quarterly inquiries.
2. Family credit 5 per cent. sample of awards.

HEALTH

Publicity

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what promotional and public information campaigns his Department is *(a)* currently running and *(b)* planning to run during the next six months; and for each campaign (i) how much it will cost, (1) in total and (2) to his Department, (ii) what agencies or bodies are undertaking the work and (iii) what is its planned duration. [7406]

Mr. Horam: Promotional and public information campaigns run by the Department are described as multi-media campaigns containing national and/or regional advertising. The total estimated cost of these campaigns is £3,488,000 in 1996–97, of which £1,335,000 is for advertising. In addition, the Department runs a number of other publicity campaigns, for example health of the nation, overseas travel and help with health costs. These use a wide range of different media, including publications, videos, teleresponse lines and exhibitions. Decisions have not been made on the use of national and/or regional advertising for 1997–98. Other information requested for the current year is in the table.

Campaign	*Advertising Agency*	*Planned duration*
Maternity	Ogilvy and Mather	2 weeks
Health services	Media System Ltd.	All year
Professional recruitment	Saatchi and Saatchi	2 weeks
National Blood publicity	Euro RSCG Wnek Gosper	2 x 3 weeks
	Mustoe Merrimann	2 weeks

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department has spent on promotional or public information campaigns in each of the last five years; and how much he estimates will be spent on these campaigns during the (i) current and (ii) next financial years. [7534]

Mr. Horam: Promotional and public information campaigns run by the Department are described as multi-media campaigns containing national and/or regional advertising. In addition, the Department runs a number of other publicity campaigns, for example, keep warm keep well, overseas travel and help with health costs. These use a wide range of different media including publications, videos, teleresponse lines and exhibitions. Decisions have not been made on the 1997–98 publicity programme. Other information for campaigns which include national and/or regional advertising is in the table.

£ million

Campaign description	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*'1996–97*
AIDS Travel Safe	—	—	0.64	0.27	—	—
Blood Donor Recruitment	1.03	0.98	1.58	1.15	1.33	1.29
Children's Act	0.73	—	—	—	—	—
Community Care	—	1.29	0.54	—	—	—
Cot Deaths	1.61	—	—	—	—	—
Drug and Solvent Abuse	3.92	4.97	5.38	4.44	—	—
Elderly Health	0.53	—	—	—	—	—
Food Hygiene/Safety	0.34	0.43	0.35	—	—	—
GP Out of Hours	—	—	—	—	0.86	—
Health of the Nation	1.01	2.66	—	—	—	—
HOTN Mental Illness	—	—	—	0.60	—	—
HOTN Unwanted Pregnancy	—	—	0.41	—	0.67	—
Health Service Professions	3.91	0.96	0.95	1.32	0.98	1.95
Immunisation	—	—	0.22	—	—	—
Maternity	—	—	—	—	—	0.25
Organ Donation	—	1.99	1.31	1.58	1.68	—
Patient's Charter	3.11	0.81	—	—	—	—
Women's Health	0.51	—	—	—	—	—
Unification of Prescription Charges	—	—	—	—	0.30	—
Patients not Paper	—	—	—	—	0.08	0.08

' Estimated expenditure.

Polio Vaccinations

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of children presently being vaccinated against polio. [7492]

Mr. Horam: Approximately 600,000 children under the age of two in England are immunised against polio each year. Provisional figures for 1995–96 show that 96 per cent. of children in England were immunised against polio by their second birthday. The World Health Organisation has recognised the United Kingdom as one of the countries which have eliminated indigenous polio due to wild virus. The Government are now working to assemble the necessary data to earn a WHO certificate of eradication as part of the programme for the global eradication of polio by 2000.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the amounts (i) in cash term and (ii) in real terms and *(b)* the percentage changes in the funding for personal social services for each of the last five years and the projected figures for the next three years. [7478]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is set out:

	Cash (£ million)	*Annual percentage change*	*Real terms (£ million at 1996–97 prices)*
1992–93	4,850	—	5,320
1993–94	5,585	+15.2	5,954
1994–95	6,403	+14.6	6,706
1995–96	6,966	+8.8	7,123
1996–97	7,536	+8.2	7,536
1997–98	7,846	+4.1	7,692

There are no projected figures for 1998–99 and 1999–2000.

General Medical Services Practice Nurses

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general medical services practice nurses there were in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1995 in (i) Sheffield, (ii) Barnsley, (iii) Doncaster and (iv) Rotherham. [8102]

Mr. Malone: The answer is shown in the table.

Number of Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) Practice Nurses at 1 October.

FHSA[1]	*1990*	*1995*
Barnsley	26	40
Doncaster	53	60
Rotherham	34	48
Sheffield	107	117

Source:
GMS census.
Notes:
[1] Practice nurse data are only available on a family health services authority basis.

Latex Allergy

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investigations his Department is making into the incidence of latex allergy. [6629]

Mr. Horam: The Medical Devices Agency—MDA—has a system for investigating adverse incidents associated with all medical devices, including those manufactured from natural rubber latex. In April 1996, the MDA published a device bulletin entitled "Latex Sensitisation in the Health Care Setting (Use of Latex Gloves)", copies of which are available in the Library.

Peanut Allergy

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has prepared for environmental health officers on promoting awareness of the dangers of peanut allergy. [6632]

Mr. Horam: The Department is currently reconsidering its advice on peanut allergy, particularly in respect of consumption of peanuts or products containing peanuts by young children. To that end, we are commissioning work by an expert group who will convene in January 1997 and should be in a position to report by mid-1997.

Paracetamol

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to publicise the inquiry into the labelling, prescribing and sale of products containing paracetamol; and if he will make a statement. [7501]

Mr. Malone: There has been wide publicity. On 22 November 1996, a press release was issued to announce the commencement of a public consultation exercise, seeking views on label warnings and pack sizes of paracetamol available without prescription. The announcement received prominent media coverage. The consultation letter giving details of proposals has been sent to 245 professional bodies, consumer organisations and marketing authorisation holders. Articles and commentaries have been carried by medical and pharmaceutical journals and the trades press as well as national newspapers.

Anti-drugs Policies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of anti-drugs policies in reducing the consumption of *(a)* alcohol, *(b)* tobacco, *(c)* medicinal drugs, *(d)* ecstasy, *(e)* ketamine, *(f)* heroin and *(g)* cannabis. [7502]

Mr. Malone: Concerning illegal drug misuse, I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council gave my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Rathbone) on 13 May, *Official Report*, columns *341–42*.

The Government's policies to prevent the misuse of alcohol and reduce the consumption of tobacco are subject to continuing evaluation.

The misuse of ketamine, which is not currently a controlled drug, is kept under review.

Matters relating to the prescription of medicinal drugs are for clinicians, who are expected to follow the general guidance which is available, especially that in the British National Formulary, copies of which are available in the Library.

Health Authority Expenditure

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each health authority its distance from weighted capitation target for 1997–98. [7936]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) on 3 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *638*.

Challenge Fund Bids

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if those bids for centenary care challenge fund approval for 1996–97 will also receive funding in 1997–98. [7938]

Mr. Burns: Arrangements for the continuing care challenge fund are set out in EL(96)109, copies of which are available in the Library; £16 million is available to support continuing health care schemes in 1996–97 and £20 million, to be matched by £40 million from health and/or local authorities, will be available for 1997–98. Health authorities have been asked to submit, separately, bids for funds for 1996–97 by 13 December 1996 and by 24 January 1997 for further funds in 1997–98.

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what priority will be given to health authorities over their weighted capitation target for mental health challenge fund money in 1997–98. [7940]

Mr. Burns: None. The criteria for assessing bids against the fund are set out in EL(96) 109 issued to chief executives of health authorities and NHS trusts on 29 November 1996.

NHS Trust Finance

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the forecast *(a)* annual income *(b)* expenditure and *(c)* operational surplus or deficit at the end of 1996–97 for each NHS trust based on their 1996–97 second quarter returns to the NHS executive; and what is the forecast retained surplus or deficit for each trust at the end of 1996–97 based on these returns and taking account of (i) profit or loss on fixed assets, (ii) net interest receivable or payable and (iii) public dividend capital payable. [7957]

Mr. Malone: The 1996–97 financial information based on forecasts at quarter 2 will be placed in the Library shortly.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral answer of 3 December, *Official Report*, column 779, if he will list the name of the trust and value of the deficit of *(a)* each of the 16 NHS trusts which recorded real retained deficits in 1994–95, *(b)* each of the 10 of those NHS trusts which remained in real deficit in 1995–96 and *(c)* each of the five of those NHS trusts which are forecast to show a further deficit in 1996–97. [7959]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is as follows:

(a) Trusts which recorded real deficits in 1994–95

Trust	*Value of deficit £000*
Humberside Ambulance	622
United Leeds Teaching Hospitals	334
Louth and District	25
Lincoln Hospitals	257
Sheffield Children's	245
East Anglian Ambulance	68
Mid Anglia Community	44
Royal National Orthopaedic	3,436
Royal National Throat Nose and Ear	826
Greenwich Healthcare	2,888
Crawley Horsham	1,154
Swindon and Marlborough	522
The Poole Hospital	226
Royal United Hospital Bath	2,545
Worcester Royal Infirmary	944
Wolverly	155

(b) Trusts which remained in real deficit in 1995–96

Trust	*Value of deficit £000*
United Leeds Teaching	6,988
Lincoln Hospitals	896
East Anglian Ambulance	998
Mid Anglia Community	119
Royal National Orthopaedic	907
Royal National Throat Nose and Ear	3,586
Greenwich Healthcare	4,000
Crawley Horsham	987
Swindon and Marlborough	1,029
Royal United Hospital Bath	586

c) Trusts which are forecasting a further real deficit in 1996–97

The information requested will be placed in the Library shortly.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral answer of 3 December, *Official Report*, column 779, if he will list *(a)* the name of each NHS trust which is currently forecast to show a deficit at the end of 1996–97 and *(b)* the values of the end of year deficit forecast for each of these trusts. [7961]

Mr. Malone: The information requested will be placed in the Library shortly.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral answer of 3 December, *Official Report*, column 779, if he will list *(a)* the name of each NHS trust which had a real retained deficit at the end of 1995–96 and *(b)* the value of the deficit recorded by each of these trusts in that year. [7960]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is as follows:

Trust	*Value of deficit £000*
Crawley and Horsham	987
Derby City General Hospital	2,171
Dorset Community	446
East Anglian Ambulance	998
East Somerset Hospital	291
Forest Healthcare	2,361
Greenwich Healthcare	4,000
Harefield Hospital	593
Heathlands Mental Health	788
Horton General Hospital	737
Ipswich Hospital	158
Lincoln Hospitals	896
Mid Anglia Community Health	119
North Kent Healthcare	730
Northwick Park Hospital	629

Trust	Value of deficit £000
Oxfordshire Learning Disabilities	317
Pinderfields Hospital	3,161
Royal Cornwall Hospital and West Cornwall Hospital	485
Royal Hospital of St. Barts, Royal London and London Chest Hospital	5,938
Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital	907
Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital	3,586
Royal United Hospital, Bath	586
Scarborough and NE Yorks. Healthcare	3,184
South Devon Healthcare	821
South Manchester University Hospitals	5,962
Southend Community Care	750
St. Albans and Hemel Hempstead	32
St. James's and Seacroft University Hospital	2,789
St. Mary's Hospital	1,024
Swindon and Marlborough	1,029
The Royal Surrey County	334
The Royal West Sussex	1,465
United Leeds Teaching Hospital	6,988
Worthing and Southlands Hospitals	2,964

Contraception

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is available through the common information core element of the "The Health of the Nation" strategy monitoring programme of the NHS executive as to *(a)* the number of girls aged under 16 years contacting general medical practitioners for contraceptives and *(b)* the number of girls aged under 16 years contacting family planning clinics in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and if he will give a breakdown of those figures by health authority. [7834]

Mr. Horam: The information requested will be placed in the Library.

Mrs. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether it remains his policy not to collect information centrally about contraception and teenage women; and what assessment he has made of the consistency of that policy with the terms of the letter from the NHS executive headquarters dated 12 November to Mrs. Victoria Gillick; [7835]

(2) what assessment he has made of the statement in the letter from the NHS executive dated 12 November to Mrs. Victoria Gillick that common information core data relating to first contacts, including those involving conception rates and contraceptives, is collected as part of the NHS executive's performance management framework. [7836]

Mr. Horam: Some information is collected centrally about contraception and teenage women. I will write to my hon. Friend about this and the letter from the national health service executive headquarters dated 12 November to Mrs. Victoria Gillick.

Bridge Child Care Development Scheme

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to fund the Bridge child care development scheme for the next financial year. [7937]

Mr. Burns: The Bridge child care consultancy service is, as its name implies, a consultancy management service which local authorities commission in the normal way. I have no plans to commission the Bridge to undertake any work for the Department of Health at present.

Intensive and High Dependency Care

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if those bids for funding of adult intensive and high dependency care approved for 1996–97 will also receive funding in 1997–98. [7939]

Mr. Horam: Yes.

North Yorkshire Ambulance Service

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when *(a)* he and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department last met (i) the chairman and (ii) the chief executive of the North Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS trust. [7956]

Mr. Horam: Ministers have had no recent meetings with the North Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS trust, but the national health service executive continues to have regular meetings with the trust.

Health Authority Finance

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the forecast annual *(a)* income and *(b)* expenditure at the end of the 1996–97 financial year for each health authority based on the 1996–97 second quarter statements of income and expenditure submitted to the NHS executive by these health authorities and trusts. [7958]

Mr. Malone: The information requested will be placed in the Library shortly.

Asylum

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated cost to local authorities of changes in the rules governing asylum in the United Kingdom over the last year; and if he will make a statement. [7506]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not available centrally.

Health Spending (North Kirklees)

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the total expenditure per head of population in the north Kirklees area by Calderdale and Kirklees health authority, with particular reference to hospital community health services and general medical services; [8218]

(2) What proportion of the £271 million he recently announced as the allocation for Calderdale and Kirklees area health authority will be spent on the population of north Kirklees. [8219]

Mr. Horam: This information is not held centrally. I refer my hon. Friend to Mr. Allan Templeton, chairman of Calderdale and Kirklees health authority.

Purchasing Authorities

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he gives to purchasing authorities in England

on how often they should check variations in their spending patterns so that they reflect variations in assessed need. [8217]

Mr. Horam: Health authorities are expected to develop and review purchasing plans to reflect the needs of their local populations within the national context set out in the NHS priorities and planning guidance. These plans are subject to public consultation before being agreed in corporate contracts with NHS executive regional offices.

Learning Disabilities

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the percentage of the total budget for each health authority spent on services for people with learning disabilities for the latest available year. [4806]

Mr. Burns *[holding answer 20 November 1996]:* The percentage of the total budget spent on services for people with learning disabilities for each health authority in 1995–96 will be placed in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 10 December 1996

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many non-departmental public bodies there are; what percentage of appointments to these bodies are held by *(a)* women and *(b)* members of ethnic minorities; and when the annual list of such bodies will be published. [8816]

Mr. Freeman: These figures are set out in the Cabinet Office—OPS—booklet "Public Bodies 1996", which is published today. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House. I am pleased to say that on 1 April 1996 there were 1,194 non-departmental public bodies—a fall of 33, or 2.7 per cent. since 1995, and of 973, or 45 per cent. since 1979. As of 1 September 1996, 31 per cent. of appointments to these bodies were held by women and 3.3 per cent. by members of the ethnic minorities; both of these are increases on the relevant figures for the previous year. This shows the success of the Government's policies of increasing equality of opportunity in public life, while at the same time reducing the size of the public sector overall.

Staff Contracts

Mr. Hain: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, columns *347–49*, on staff numbers, how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* non-permanent staff there have been in (i) his Department and (ii) executive agencies of his Department in each year since 1992. [7849]

Mr. Willetts: This answer covers the Cabinet Office, Office of Public Service, its executive agencies, HMSO and the Central Office of Information. We do not hold a complete record of the requested information but the figures we have are as follows:

1 April 1996

	Permanent	*Non-permanent*
Cabinet Office	601	12
OPS	447	25
CCTA	266	10
Civil Service College	250	35
Recruitment and Assessment Services	141	15
Occupational Health and Safety Agency	n/a	n/a
Chessington Computer Centre	n/a	n/a
SAFE	1,046	146
PACE	268	62
TBA	116	11
HMSO	2,651	200
COI	438	24

n/a = Full details not available.

1 April 1995

	Permanent	*Non-permanent*
Cabinet Office	645	6
OPSS	892	18
Civil Service College	n/a	n/a
Recruitment and Assessment Services	129	14
Occupational Health and Safety Agency	n/a	n/a
Chessington Computer Centre	n/a	n/a
HMSO	2,891	163
COI	508	20

n/a = Full details not available.

1 April 1994

	Permanent	*Non-permanent*
Cabinet Office	436	15
OPSS	888	49
Civil Service College	n/a	n/a
Recruitment and Assessment Services	143	10
Occupational Health and Safety Agency	n/a	n/a
Chessington Computer Centre	n/a	n/a
HMSO	3,041	98
COI	515	22

n/a = Full details not available.

1 April 1993

	Permanent	*Non-permanent*
Cabinet Office	462	—
OPSS	846	—
Civil Service College	n/a	n/a
Recruitment and Assessment Services	194	—
Occupational Health and Safety Agency	n/a	n/a
Chessington Computer Centre	n/a	n/a
HMSO	3,146	58
COI	578	14

n/a = Full details not available.
A dash denotes where the total number of non-permanent staff has not been recorded.

1 April 1992

	Permanent	*Non-permanent*
Cabinet Office (including OMCS)	926	—
Civil Service College	n/a	n/a
Recruitment and Assessment Services	239	—
Occupational Health and Safety Agency	n/a	n/a
HMSO	3,289	59
COI	643	24

n/a = Full details not available.
A dash denotes where the total number of non-permanent staff has not been recorded.
The Cabinet Office has been affected by several machinery of government changes over this period and it is therefore not realistic to make comparisons between years.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Japan (Dolphins)

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise the issue of cruelty to dolphins in Japanese waters during the event known as iruka no oikami ryo at forthcoming international conferences; what representations he has made to the Japanese Government on this issue; and if he will make a statement. [7727]

Dr. Liam Fox: No representations have been made to the Japanese Government on this issue.

Whitehall Building

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his proposals for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office building, Whitehall. [8189]

Mr. Hanley: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office building—Old Public Offices, Whitehall—is being refurbished for the first time since construction was completed in 1875 to provide modern office accommodation for the long term needs of this Department. On completion in January 1997 it will provide 25 per cent. more space allowing leased buildings to be given up, thus reducing running costs and improving operational efficiency.

Nicaragua

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the recent elections in Nicaragua; and if he will make a statement. [8190]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: As I told the House on 19 November, *Official Report*, column *459*, independent observers concluded that the elections in Nicaragua, although not flawless, were conducted in a fair and transparent manner and contributed to the further consolidation of democracy. We share that view.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8536]

Mr. Hanley: There was one such appointment.

PRIME MINISTER

Knighthoods

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Prime Minister how many knighthoods have been awarded to *(a)* Conservative and *(b)* Labour hon. Members in each year since November 1979. [8444]

The Prime Minister: One hundred and thirty Conservative and four Labour hon. members have received knighthoods since 1979. Successive leaders of the Labour party have refused to recommend awards for political services.

Engagements

Sir Pater Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 December. [7002]

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 December. [7001]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Prime Minister how much will be spent on Christmas trees and decorations for his official residences at *(a)* Chequers and *(b)* Downing street; how many Christmas trees will be bought for these two residences; and what are the types and county of origin of the trees. [7566]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* The British Christmas Tree Growers Association has donated one Christmas tree, and three others have been donated by the Chequers estate. Approximately £460 has been spent on decorations for Downing street. Similar information for Chequers is a matter for the trustee's.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Prime Minister how much his office plans to spend on celebrating Christmas and the new year. [7588]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* As far as I am aware, none.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Human Genetics Advisory Commission

Mr. Alton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if the Human Genetics Advisory Commission will include industrialists with a direct interest in the development of genetics; [8243]

(2) how the Human Genetics Advisory Commission will be financed; and what will be the remuneration for the chairman and members; [8241]

(3) for what reasons no lay representation has been included in the membership of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission; [8245]

(4) what criteria were used to select members of the new Human Genetics Advisory Commission; and if he will *(a)* publish and *(b)* place in the Library, details of their curricula vitae; [8240]

(5) when membership of the Human Genetic Advisory Commission will next be reviewed; [8244]

(6) what account he took of dissenting views about genetic engineering in appointing the members of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission. [8242]

Mr. Ian Taylor: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) on 2 December, *Official Report*, columns *488–89*, announcing the membership of this new body.

The advisory commission is intended to take a broad perspective on the implications of human genetics, rather than represent the interests of any particular group. Members have been chosen on their own merits, in consultation with the public appointments unit, and represent between them informed and interested opinion on developments in genetics. Their curriculum vitae have been provided on a personal and confidential basis. Lay members have been included.

The advisory commission is a non-executive body with a joint secretariat provided by the Office of Science and Technology and the Department of Health. Appointments are for two years in the first instance. Members' expenses will be paid.

Health and Safety

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if his Department has signed the Melbourne declaration on injury prevention and control, adopted on 22 February. [7945]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The third international conference on injury prevention, held in Melbourne in February 1996, brought together representatives of the international injury prevention and control community, but was not an intergovernmental conference.

The so-called "Melbourne declaration", adopted by the conference, addresses certain recommendations to Governments, among others, but does not provide for formal endorsement by Governments of its conclusions.

Public Holidays

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many public holidays there were in each of the past five years in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland, *(d)* England, *(e)* the Netherlands, *(f)* France and *(g)* Italy. [7497]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* The information requested is shown in the following table:

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
England	8	8	8	8	8
Wales	8	8	8	8	8
Scotland[1]	8	8	8	8[2]	8
N.Ireland	10	10	10	10	10
Netherlands[3]	9	9	8	8	8
Italy	10	10	10	10	9[4]
France	11	11	11	11	11

Source:

Official Journals of the European Communities.

Notes:

[1] Subject to regional, local and institutional variations.

[2] There was an additional bank holiday on the 8 May 1995 to link with commemorative arrangements for the 50th anniversary of VE Day. This was in addition to the existing 1 May 1995 bank holiday; in practice, most employers in Scotland observed one of these two holidays.

[3] Liberation day (5 May) is observed in the civil service and by some trade groups. It is listed as a public holiday in the *"Official Journal of the European Communities"* in some years but not others.

[4] Immaculate Conception Day (8 December) is not listed as a holiday in the "Official Journal of the European Communities" for 1996 but remains a public holiday in Italy.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what occasions Mr. A, whose name has been supplied to him, advised the DTI on Synex Ltd.'s application for regional selective assistance. [6236]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 27 November 1996]:* In respect of the application by Synex Ltd. Mr. A provided written accountancy advice on three occasions, through reports dated 7 January 1995, 19 January 1995 and 22 February 1995. Mr. A however ceased to be retained by the Department as an advisor before appraisal of all aspects of the case was completed. The accountancy aspects of the case were therefore fully reviewed by the Department's central industrial development unit.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what dates the South-West industrial development board discussed the application of Synex Ltd. for regional selective assistance; and which members were present. [6229]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 27 November 1996]:* The application was referred to at five meetings of the board. Three of these, on 21 December 1994, 12 April 1995 and 28 June 1995, were simply reports on the receipt of the application or its progress. The application was discussed substantially at two meetings held on 25 January 1995 and 22 February 1995 when the board members present were as follows:

25 January 1995

Mr. R. Harris (Chairman)

Mr. N. Falls

Mr. P. Gregory

Mr. M. Jordan

Mr. A. Loze

22 February 1995

Mr. R. Harris (Chairman)

Mr. N. Falls

Mr. P. Gregory

Mr. M. Jordan

Mr. A. Loze

Mr. V. Parsons

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what declarations of interest *(a)* Mr. B and *(b)* Mr. C, whose names have been supplied to him, made at meetings of the South-West industrial development board to discuss the application of Synex Ltd. for regional selective assistance; and on which occasions they left meetings where a conflict of interest might arise. [6235]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 27 November 1996]:* It is not recorded that Mr. B made a declaration of interest in the application by Synex Ltd.

At the meeting of the SWIDB held on 21 December 1994 members were informed about an imminent application from Synex Ltd. Mr. C declared immediately he had an interest in the case. Mr. C did not attend the meeting on 25 January 1995 when the application by Synex Ltd. was first substantively discussed, and absented himself from the discussion which took place on 22 February. The two subsequent meetings on 12 April and 28 June were essentially updating the board about progress of the case and it was not felt necessary for Mr. C to withdraw.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what factors underlay the decisions by *(a)* DTI South-East to award a regional selective assistance grant to Synex Ltd. and *(b)* DTI South-West to refuse such a grant; [6232]

(2) what factors underlay the refusal by his Department's south-west office to award a regional selective assistance grant to Synex Ltd. [6233]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 27 November 1996]:* Each application for regional selective assistance is determined on its merits against the common criteria for the scheme, which are explained in the Department's brochure, "Investing in the Assisted Areas", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The project as presented to Government office SW was judged not to have satisfied the criteria.

Funeral Pre-payment Plans

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the consumer protection regime governing the market for funeral pre-payment plans sold by companies to elderly people on the endorsement of registered charities. [7456]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* I addressed this matter in the recent consultation paper published by my Department in July on pre-paid funerals. The question of endorsements by registered charities in England and Wales is a matter for the Charity Commission. Charities are also subject to regulation in Scotland through the Scottish charities office. Advertisements featuring such endorsements are subject to controls by the Advertising Standards Authority. In the consultation document, it was proposed that the nature of the relationship between the plan provider and the charity—or the charity's trading subsidiary—should be made clear to the customer. I am currently reviewing the responses on this and the rest of the proposals.

Car Production

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cars were produced in the United Kingdom in each year since 1979 by (i) United Kingdom companies and (ii) United Kingdom-owned companies. [7827]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* Figures showing the number of cars produced in the United Kingdom each year, including production by company, are published by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders Ltd. whose publication, 'World Automotive Statistics', with figures for the years in question, are available in the Library of the House. The ownership of UK car manufacturers may also be derived from commercial databases such as *The Financial Times* "Profile" also available in the Library of the House. However, assembling the information on UK-owned car manufacturers for this time period could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Cotton Fabric

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will make a statement on duties on cotton loomstate imports of cloth from *(a)* China, *(b)* Egypt, *(c)* India, *(d)* Indonesia, *(e)* Pakistan and *(f)* Turkey; if he will list the levels of import duties; when those duties came into effect; and for what reasons they were introduced; [8267]

(2) if he will make it his policy to renegotiate import duties on cotton fabrics from *(a)* China, *(b)* Egypt, *(c)* India, *(d)* Indonesia, *(e)* Pakistan and *(f)* Turkey; and what discussions his Department has had on these matters with the European Commission; [8269]

(3) what assessment he has made as to the extent to which European Union demand for 72 by 96, 30's/30's cc 4 by 1 weft sateen 50 inch and 56 inch, 100 per cent. cotton fabric and 140 by 48, 30's/10's cc 5 by 1 warp satin 50 inch and 59 inch, 100 per cent. cotton fabric exceeds European Union manufactured supply of these fabrics; and if he will make a statement; [8271]

(4) what recent representations he has received from those in the textile and clothing industries about the effect of recent increases in import duties on cotton fabrics; what assessment he has made of the impact of increased costs associated with such duties on profitability and company viability in the British textile and clothing sector; and if he will make a statement; [8268]

(5) what studies his Department undertook prior to the imposition of higher import duties on cotton fabrics from *(a)* China, *(b)* Egypt, *(c)* India, *(d)* Indonesia, *(e)* Pakistan and *(f)* Turkey on the extent to which the fabrics could be sourced within the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [8270]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* On 21 November 1996 the European Commission imposed provisional anti-dumping duties for six months on imports of unbleached cotton fabrics from China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Turkey. The duty rates are set out in Commission Regulation (EC) No. 2208/96 of 18 November 1996 published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* No. L295 of 20 November 1996. This is available in the Library of the House. The decision followed the Commission's preliminary investigation of a complaint that the products were being dumped in the Community by the countries concerned.

At this provisional stage, the Commission is obliged to consult member states but is able to impose duties on its own authority. My Department has received a considerable number of representations against the measures from companies in the textiles finishing sector and from the British Apparel and Textiles Confederation. Accordingly, and in the light of our own analysis, we told the Commission that we strongly opposed the duties because the adverse effects would far outweigh any benefits to EU producers of cotton fabrics.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade raised the mater personally with Sir Leon Brittan. Although Sir Leon ultimately decided to authorise the provisional duties, he has undertaken to carry out a thorough analysis of the balance of interests before deciding whether to propose that they be made definitive. The UK will vote against any such proposal, which to be implemented would require the support of a simple majority of member states. At present, the indications are that no such majority exists.

ENVIRONMENT

Publicity

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what promotional and public information campaigns his Department is *(a)* currently running and *(b)* planning to run during the next six months; and for each campaign (i) how much it will cost, (1) in total and (2) to his Department, (ii) what agencies or bodies are undertaking the work and (iii) what is its planned duration. [7412]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department produces a range of public information programmes related to its policy responsibilities. Advertising is placed through the Central Office of Information and other publicity work is competitively tendered using a variety of suppliers. Estimated publicity expenditure for the current financial year by subject area is as follows:

	£000
Environmental and Energy Efficiency	2,509
Sustainable Development	2,200
Urban Regeneration and Private Finance	308
Competitiveness and the Environment	272
Housing	250
Planning	200
Water	77
Construction sponsorship	53
Property and Building	32
Total	5,901

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much his Department has spent on promotional or public information campaigns in each of the last five years; and how much he estimates will be spent on these campaigns during the (i) current and (ii) next financial years. [7535]

Current planned expenditure for 1996–97 is £5.9 million. Plans for 1997–98 have yet to be finalised.

Sir Paul Beresford: The figures for expenditure on public information campaigns in each of the last five years are detailed in the table:

	£000
1991–92	2,700
1992–93	14,697
1993–94	12,108
1994–95	8,878
1995–96	7,383

Beaches

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each year since 1991 those beaches in each region which complied with the EU bathing water standard guide for *(a)* total and faecal coliforms, *(b)* faecal streptococci, and *(c)* coliforms and faecal streptococci combined. [7434]

Mr. Clappison: The information requested has been placed in the Library of the House because of the volume of data involved.

Tooting Bec Psychiatric Hospital

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to make a decision on the proposals for the development of the former Tooting Bec psychiatric hospital site. [7643]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State has decided, on the information before him, not to exercise his powers under section 77 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and call in the planning application to develop housing on the former Tooting Bec hospital site.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to ensure that products which contain asbestos are individually and permanently marked as such. [7900]

Sir Paul Beresford: The requirements regarding the labelling of products containing asbestos are laid down in the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1985 as amended in 1992 and the Asbestos Products (Safety) Regulations 1985 as amended in 1987. There are no plans to introduce any further labelling measures at present.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures the Government have taken to encourage the use of substitutes for asbestos-containing products. [7898]

Sir Paul Beresford: Existing legal measures encourage the use of substitutes for products containing asbestos. These range from widespread prohibitions on the supply of products containing asbestos to those which govern the use of asbestos at work. The Health and Safety Executive and local authorities continue to enforce these regulations, and in particular regulation 8 of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987 which requires every employer to prevent exposure to asbestos by substitution with safer materials where reasonably practicable.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what statistics he has collated on levels of asbestos use in London since 1986. [7902]

Sir Paul Beresford: No statistics on the levels of asbestos use in London since 1986 have been collated by the Department of the Environment.

Gipsy Sites

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many schemes for permanent gipsy sites agreed under the former gipsy site policy he is currently obliged to finance; and if the financial arrangements apply only to agreements made under the former policy. [7782]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: There remains 88 schemes for permanent gipsy sites which were submitted by local authorities before the power to pay gipsy sites grant—section 70 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980—was repealed on 3 November 1994. Of those, 83 have received formal grant approval from the Secretary of State; the remaining five have yet to be determined. The power to pay grant applies only to applications submitted in accordance with departmental guidance issued to local authorities under the 1980 Act.

Marine Pollution

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what communications he has had with the Marine Conservation Society in regard to pollution arising from the offshore oil and gas industry. [7894]

Mr. Clappison: My colleagues and I have had no communications with the Marine Conservation Society on that issue.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what licences to discharge radioactive materials, collected during operations, to sea have been issued to offshore oil and gas exploration drilling and storage platforms. [8359]

Mr. Clappison: Authorisations to discharge to sea the materials containing naturally occurring radionuclides arising during offshore oil and gas exploration, drilling and storage operations are issued under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993. The Environment Agency holds records of authorisations issued for the English and Welsh sectors on the public register at its Warrington office—Richard Fairclough house, Knutsford road, Warrington, WA4 1HG. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency holds records of authorisations issued for the Scottish sector at its Aberdeen office—Greyhope house, Greyhope road, Torry, Aberdeen, AB11 9RD.

Health and Safety

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many health and safety inspectors there were in *(a)* 1986 and *(b)* 1995. [7901]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Health and Safety Executive employed the following number of health and safety inspectors in:

Year (1 April)	*Number of inspectors*
1986	1,231.50
1995	1,477.60

Figures given are full-time equivalent counts: part-timers were counted as half units until 1 April 1995; since then they are counted on the basis of the proportion of a full week that they work. For information there are also a broadly comparable number employed by local authorities.

Environmental Information Appeals Tribunal

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what immediate plans he has to seek an early parliamentary opportunity to introduce legislation to establish an environmental information appeals tribunal. [7932]

Mr. Clappison: I have no immediate plans to introduce legislation to establish an environmental information appeals tribunal. The recently published first report of the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities on freedom of access to information on the environment recommends different procedures, which are being carefully considered.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how much his Department will spend on Christmas trees and decorations this year; how many Christmas trees will be bought for his Department's headquarters; and what are the type and country of origin of the trees; [7557]

(2) how much his Department plans to spend on celebrating Christmas and the new year. [7581]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* Total expenditure by my Department, including its agencies and the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executive on Christmas trees and decorations is expected to be around £3,000. This includes one tree bought for the Department's headquarters building in Marsham street. It has not been possible to determine the type and country of origin of every tree, but all those can be verified, including the tree in Marsham street, an English spruce are British. Beyond that and official Christmas cards, the Department is not planning to spend any more money celebrating Christmas or the new year.

Local Government Finance

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated pool for England of total receipts from national non-domestic rates in 1997–98; what the pool was in 1996–97; what the pool was in 1996–97; what is the estimated grant from the pool in 1997–98 to the county councils of *(a)* Somerset, *(b)* Devon and *(c)* Dorset; and what was the grant for *(a)* to *(c)* for the national non-domestic rating pool in 1996–97. [8065]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) on 27 November, *Official Report*, columns *242–44*.

The amounts to be distributed from the pool in 1996–97, and the provisional amounts for 1997–98, for the county councils listed, are as follows:

£ million

	1996–97	*1997–98*
Somerset county council	98.200	93.555
Devon county council	216.439	205.917
Dorset county council	138.277	73.691

The figure for Dorset CC for 1997–98 take account of reorganisation at 1 April 1997.

Oil Pollution

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the long-term ecological implications of the discharge of oil-based drilling mud from the North Cormorant platform in April 1989. [8357]

Mr. Clappison: None.

Genetically engineered Crops

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many genetically engineered crops are permitted to be grown in the United States. [7841]

Mr. Clappison: The Secretary of State has granted 99 consents for specific trials of genetically modified engineered crops in Great Britain since the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992—as amended in 1995—came into force on 1 February 1993. The information relating to Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Three genetically modified crops have been authorised to be grown throughout the European Union under the marketing provisions of Council directive 90/220/EEC.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what restrictions there are on the importation of genetically engineered crops into the United Kingdom. [7842]

Mr. Clappison: The importation and marketing of genetically modified engineered crops in Great Britain are controlled by part VI of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and regulations made under it, in particular for import the Genetically Modified Organisms (Risk Assessment) (Records and Exemption) Regulations 1996, as amended in 1995. The information relating to Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8538]

Sir Paul Beresford: The public appointments unit is a valuable source of candidates. No central record is maintained of the sources of names of appointees and in some cases they may have been nominated from more than one source. I regret that the information cannot be provided in the form requested.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Computers

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee what has been the total cost to date of cabling the parliamentary estate for access to the parliamentary data and video network; what is the estimated cost of completing the cabling; what estimate he has made of the impact on hon. Members' office cost allowances of hon. Members upgrading their computer systems to make use of the PDVN network; for what reasons the Director of Communications has refused to connect to the PDVN machines using Microsoft Windows 95; and if he will make a statement on problems encountered. [8342]

Mr. Waller: The cabling for the parliamentary data and video network—PDVN—is being installed in conjunction with electrical rewiring, telephone cable renewal and associated asbestos removal, and it is not possible to give a meaningful figure for the cost of the PDVN cabling alone.

The pace of change in information technology inevitably means that desktop equipment may have to be updated at intervals if hon. Members wish to have access to the full range of enhanced services available on the PDVN. Guidance on the most appropriate systems for connection to the PDVN, making effective use of resources available from the office costs allowance, is given by the Director of Communications on request.

The Director of Communications encourages the continued use of Windows 3.11, while the reliability of network use of Windows 95 is being assessed, but recognises that increasing numbers of new machines purchased by hon. Members come with Windows 95 installed and will arrange for connection of Windows 95 machines to the PDVN. Connection of Windows 95 machines to the PDVN via modem is, however, currently not available, due to technical incompatibilities. Changes to the PDVN are currently being tested with a view to offering this service in the new year.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Children Act Advisory Committee

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the future of the Children Act Advisory Committee. [8815]

Mr. Streeter: On 14 May 1996, during the passage of the Family Law Bill through Parliament, my right hon. and noble friend the Lord Chancellor announced his intention to set up a new advisory board for five years to monitor the implementation of the Family Law Act 1996, and to advise the Lord Chancellor on issues arising from its implementation. The board will be appointed early in the new year; it will be inter-disciplinary, and its chairman will be independent of the court system. As a consequence, the Children Act Advisory Committee will cease to exist after July 1997.

The new body will be known as the Advisory Board on Family Law. It will report to the Lord Chancellor, and will deal—broadly speaking—with those aspects of family policy and law which are covered by the Family Law Act 1996 and fall within his departmental responsibility. Its precise terms of reference will include a remit to consider the overall impact of Children Act work within the family courts system. To provide continuity with the work of the Children Act Advisory Committee, the membership of the Advisory Board on Family Law will include a family division judge or a Court of Appeal judge with family division experience.

The network of family court business committees and family court forums will continue to deal with operational aspects of Children Act work at local level. They will, as now, be able to refer policy issues to the Lord Chancellor, the Court Service, or the relevant Government Department, as appropriate. At national level, the children's services strategy group, which was recently set up by the Secretary of State for Health, will have a wider role in co-ordinating the interests of Government and other key agencies.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8549]

Mr. Streeter: No appointments have been made in the past year from names which had been first identified by the public appointments unit. The candidates for appointment to the Department's more significant public bodies have been identified following advertising, in line with the code of the commissioner for public appointments.

Magistrates Court Committees

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations he has received from the Coventry magistrates court committee in respect of the proposed amalgamation of the Coventry, Birmingham and Solihull magistrates court committees. [7848]

Mr. Streeter: As at yesterday morning, the Coventry magistrates courts committee had not submitted a response to the consultation paper issued by my Department on this proposed amalgamation. However, the consultation period does not end until 16 December 1996.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many letters *(a)* in support of and *(b)* against the proposed amalgamation of the Coventry, Birmingham and Solihull magistrates court committees he has received; and who they were from. [7846]

Mr. Streeter: By yesterday morning, four letters had been received in support of the proposal and 105 opposing it. Representations have been received from magistrates courts committees, magistrates, court staff, members of Parliament and local justice agencies.

The consultation period closes on 16 December 1996.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consultations he has had regarding the proposed amalgamation of the Coventry, Birmingham and Solihull magistrates court committees. [7845]

Mr. Streeter: A consultation document proposing the amalgamation of the Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull magistrates courts committees was issued by my Department in October 1996. Copies of the document have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The document was sent to the three magistrates courts committees concerned and the magistrates in those areas, the staff employed by the committees, local authorities, local members of Parliament, criminal justice agencies, Her Majesty's Magistrates' Courts Service Inspectorate and neighbouring magistrates' courts committees. Once the consultation period has closed, all the repsonses received will be given detailed consideration.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Millennium Commission

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what obligations there are on the Millennium Commission to explain its decisions on grant applications. [7709]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no specific obligations set out in the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 or in section 26 directions under the Act. However, the Government expect all non-departmental public bodies to abide by the principles of public accountability and all applicants to the commission are informed of the key criteria on which decisions are taken and are told of the basis for decisions once made. The commission reports to Parliament and produces an annual report.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received about Mayflower 2000's bid to the Millennium Commission. [7513]

Mrs. Bottomley: I have received a letter on the subject. It was sent to me in my capacity as chairman of the Millennium Commission and came from the director of the Mayflower 2000 project via the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). Appended was a list of the supporters of the project.

The Millennium Commission receives a large number of applications for funding. An application for funding for the Mayflower 2000 project was received in round 2 by the Millennium Commission but at that stage was not considered sufficiently "millennial". A second application was received in round 3. Long listing will take place in January 1997 and applicants will be notified of the decisions soon after that date.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will introduce a right of appeal against decisions on grants by the Millennium Commission. [7706]

Mrs. Bottomley: There are no plans to instigate a right of appeal. The Millennium Commission receives an enormous number of applications for funding at each round, all of which compete against each other for what is, after all, a finite sum of money. The commissioners do their utmost to ensure that their decisions are fair and equitable and, in cases where technical expertise is required, they consult with independent experts.

The Millennium Commission has an established complaints procedure for allegations concerning maladministration. This includes a reference to an external independent agency should this prove necessary. The complaints procedure does not cover commissioners' decisions on whether to award a grant. In addition, the commission is subject to normal laws and can be challenged through judicial review. The Government have set up the commission to receive applications and award grants for millennium projects. It is satisfied that adequate safeguards exist against maladministration. In those circumstances, there would seem little point in second guessing the commission.

Millennium Celebrations

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultations she has had with

representatives of Christian denominations concerning her role in planning millennium activities. [7692]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* The Archbishop of Canterbury's chaplain for public affairs sits on the Millennium co-ordinating group, a forum for various public bodies involved in planning for the millennium. A sub-committee brings together the mainstream Christian Churches, ecumenical groups and representatives of other faiths. The most recent meeting took place on 2 December, and the discussion was lively, far reaching and inclusive.

I shall be attending the next meeting, in January. The Millennium Commission has also held meetings with Church representatives.

V-chip

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she will publish the results of her consultation about the V-chip. [8817]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have today issued a report of my Department's consultation on the V-chip. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

I have also announced today a programme for action designed to deal with rising public concern about violence on television. My Department will co-operate with the BBC, the Independent Television Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Commission on a programme to improve the information available to viewers about the content of programmes to be broadcast, and to publicise the policies on scheduling and the watershed. I will give my personal support to his initiative at a seminar for broadcasters to be organised by the BSC early in the new year.

The ITC and the BSC will review their codes of practice and the regulators will continue to ensure that programme makers adhere to them. My Department is also prepared to contribute to the funding of research into the potential of new technologies to provide extra support for viewers if the BSC believes that such research would be useful.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

UNITA

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the number and rank of UNITA military personnel quartered under the supervision of the United Nations verification mission III. [8311]

Dr. Liam Fox: As of 7 December 1996, 69,821 UNITA troops had been registered in 15 quartering areas. A breakdown by rank is not available.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of UNITA weapons have been surrendered to United Nations verification mission III in Angola; and if he will make a statement on the extent to which UNITA has fulfilled its obligations in this respect. [8310]

Dr. Fox: In his report of 2 December 1996 the Secretary-General stated that the United Nations is still awaiting a declaration by UNITA that it has handed over all its weapons. Although the Secretary-General confirmed that considerable progress has recently been achieved on the military front it is essential that UNITA should comply with its obligations to hand over all weapons to the United Nations Angola verification mission without delay.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of UNITA military personnel have been quartered under the supervision of United Nations verification mission III; and if he will make a statement on the extent to which UNITA has fulfilled its obligations in this respect. [8309]

Dr. Fox: In his report of 2 December 1996 the Secretary-General stated that the United Nations is still awaiting a declaration by UNITA that it has assembled all its troops. We have made clear to UNITA our disappointment that some two years after the signing of the Lusaka protocol the quartering process has still not formally been completed.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the number and types of weapons handed over by UNITA of Angola to the United Nations verification mission III. [8308]

Dr. Fox: As of 7 December 1996 the United Nations reported that 30,180 personal weapons and 4,857 crew-served weapons had been handed over to UNAVEM III by quartered UNITA soldiers.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the UN embargo on the supply of weapons to UNITA of Angola. [8307]

Dr. Fox: UN Security Council resolution 1075 of 11 October 1996 expressed deep concern at the failure by states, especially those neighbouring Angola, to implement the provisions of paragraphs 19 to 25 in resolution 864 (1993) vigorously and strictly. As a permanent member of the Security Council the United Kingdom has supported efforts to make this embargo effective.

United Nations Industrial Development Organisation

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will announce his decision on United Kingdom membership of UNIDO. [8704]

Dr. Liam Fox: We have this week informed the UN Secretary General and the Director-General of UNIDO of our intention to withdraw from UNIDO from the end of 1997. We will review this decision towards the end of next year in the light of progress on wider UN institutional reforms.

Zambia

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the recent elections in Zambia; and if he will make a statement. [8191]

Dr. Liam Fox: Although we were disappointed that the recent Zambian elections could not be held on a basis acceptable to all political parties, the results seem to have been accepted by the Zambian people. We now look to the new Zambia Government to demonstrate clearly their determination to pursue good governance and economic reform.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Criminal Cases

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Attorney-General what standing instructions he provides for servants or contractors to the Crown giving advice to the Director of Public Prosecutions in his decisions concerning the advisability or otherwise of prosecuting prima facie criminal offences. [7685]

The Attorney-General: The evidential test applied by the Crown Prosecution Service is that which is set out in the code for crown prosecutors, issued by the Director of Public Prosecutions pursuant to section 10 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985. It is accompanied by an explanatory memorandum. Copies of the current edition of the code and the explanatory memorandum are available in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament. Although statutory responsibility for the code rests with the Director of Public Prosecutions, it is her practice to consult me in relation to any proposed changes.

TRANSPORT

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8545]

Mr. Bowis: One.

Railtrack

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the tax losses made available to Railtrack on privatisation. [8303]

Mr. Watts: A total of £707 million of the British Railways Board's unrelieved trading losses were transferred to Railtrack. In accordance with the provisions of paragraph 15 of schedule 24 to the Finance Act 1994, the transferred losses may be set off only against trading income of railtrack which arose in the period during which it was a public sector railway company.

Bull Bars

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to require the removal of bull bars from existing vehicles. [8104]

Mr. Bowis: No decision has yet been made on this.

Smuggling

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many smugglers have been apprehended by HM Coastguard in each year since 1990. [7806]

Mr. Bowis: Control of smuggling is a matter for HM Customs and Excise who are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

A56

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the advantages of trunking the A56. [8193]

Mr. Watts: I met the hon. Gentleman twice last year to discuss this and other issues; on 27 February in London and on 5 June on a visit to Lancashire and Yorkshire.

The position has not changed since my letter to the hon. Gentleman of 25 April 1995, in which I said that I saw no reason for proceeding with trunking the A56—between Colne and the A59 near Skipton—outside of a more general review of the trunk road network.

The Green Paper, "Transport: the Way Forward" published in April 1996 described our response to local authority proposals on the trunk road network, at paragraph 14.84.

Railway and Underground Accidents (Children)

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by region, railway and underground railway accidents involving children under the age of 17 years, for each year between 1990 and 1996 providing a breakdown by age, nature of injury; and whether or not the accident resulted in a fatality. [7971]

Mr. Watts: Accidents to trespassers and suicides aged under 17 in Great Britain 1990–1995–1996.

Year	*Fatal*	*Major*	*Minor*	*Total*
1990	15	22	4	41
1991	2	7	1	10
1991–92	8	20	4	32
1992–93	7	15	3	25
1993–94	10	11	7	28
1994–95	9	10	6	25
1995–96	9	10	5	24
Total	60	95	30	185

Figures for 1991 are for the period 1 January 1991 to 31 March 1991 only.

The remaining information is not available in the form requested and could be provided in that format only at disproportionate cost.

Casualties to trespassers and suicides in 1995–96, analysed by operator and showing the number of children aged under 16, are shown in appendix 8A of "Railway Safety Her Majesty's Chief Inspecting Officer of railways annual report on the safety record of the railways in Great Britain during 1995–96". Copies of this report are in the Library of the House.

Road Signs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the percentage of the Highways Agency budget devoted to road signing projects in each of the last five years. [8422]

Mr. Watts: New, enhanced, alternative or replacement signs are provided from within various types of works contract. These contracts can be major national projects, large and small regional improvements, local safety schemes and maintenance works. Each year the agency completes many hundred such contracts and the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on the condition of the road signs for which his Department has responsibility in the county of Cheshire; [8442]

(2) if he will list the amount spent on road signings in the county of Cheshire by the Highways Agency in each of the last five years; and if he will list the percentage of the budget spent in Cheshire devoted to road signing in the same period. [8443]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 10 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent questions about the condition of the road signs in Cheshire, and the amount of money the Agency has spent on road signing in Cheshire.

The signs on the trunk road and motorway network in Cheshire are generally in good condition. A small proportion of signs have been identified as being in need of replacement and this work will be included in maintenance programmes when funds become available.

Expenditure on road signs within Cheshire under the maintenance programme within the last five years is as follows:

Year	*Expenditure £ million*	*Percentage of maintenance allocation*
1993–94	0.268	2.5
1994–95	0.183	1.5
1995–96	0.186	2.1
1996–97	0.180	2.4

The full information requested is not readily available as separate records are not kept of all signing work included as part of new construction or maintenance schemes.

Departmental Management Objectives

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the annual management objectives for each of his Department's divisions. [8327]

Sir George Young: The Department's principal objectives were set out in the foreword to the "Transport Report 1996" [Cm 3206]. Each agency publishes an annual business plan which includes its key targets. Copies of all these documents are in the Library of the House.

The Department's aims and main objectives are currently under review and updated aims and objectives will be published in the 1997 Transport report and departmental plan.

Noise Barriers

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 29 November, *Official Report*, column *417*, if highway authorities are empowered to fund the construction of noise barriers on existing motorways and trunk roads built *(a)* before and *(b)* after 17 October 1969. [8265]

Mr Watts *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* Yes. Section 282 of the Highways Act 1980 empowers highway authorities to fund noise barriers on motorways and trunk roads built before and after 17 October 1969. The use of this power is discretionary, and there is no obligation on highway authorities to fund the construction of noise barriers.

Shipping

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of his Department's budget was allocated to shipping matters in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1996. [7837]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* Shipping matters were the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry in 1979. Net expenditure in 1996–97 on these services, including the Marine Safety Agency, the Coastguard Agency and their associated administrative costs, forms 2 per cent. of the Department of Transport's overall expenditure control total.

M27

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total expenditure in design, legal costs, land acquisition and other preparatory work for the M27, junctions 4 to 11, widening scheme. [8033]

Mr. Watts: A preliminary widening study of M27, junctions 4 to 12, was undertaken by consultants between 1989 and 1991 at a cost of £291,000. No other costs were incurred on the scheme until its recent withdrawal from the programme.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Computerised Cattle Registration

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the introduction in Great Britain of a central computerised system to record cattle movements. [8818]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Government commissioned a feasibility study on establishing a computerised cattle traceability system in Great Britain in July 1996. The study has been completed, and its findings considered. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and I are putting forward proposals for implementation of the system.

The Government consider that improved cattle traceability would have considerable benefit in underpinning consumer confidence in the beef market. All cattle born or imported to Great Britain since 1 July 1996 have had to have a cattle passport. This records details of the animal's identity and its movements. Holding the details of movements on a computer database would improve tracing of animals still further. There are already similar databases in Northern Ireland and in some other European countries.

Under our proposals, details of the cattle movements would be entered on to the computer database by a new private sector organisation, known as the "British cattle movement service". Farmers and others in the livestock industry would send in details of cattle movements using a simple form and a "freepost" system. Businesses reporting large volumes of movements, such as livestock markets and abattoirs, would be able to use electronic data transfer, instead of a form. Access to the movement information on the database would be permitted, probably on payment of a charge.

The livestock industry will be the main beneficiary of the computerised cattle traceability system, which will be essential to help re-establish confidence in beef and beef products at home and abroad. Thus, the Government are proposing that the running costs of the system should be borne by the industry. Including the costs of postage, these are likely to be some £20 million to £25 million a year. The Government propose to meet the start-up costs of the system, estimated at some £5 million.

I recognise that this project is of great significance to the livestock industry. In order for the computerised system to be effective, it will be essential to have the industry's support. Thus during implementation of the system, the Government will continue the close liaison they have had with the industry during and since the feasibility study commissioned in July. We look forward to a constructive dialogue with the industry on the proposals in our consultation document, a copy of which has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The deadline for responses is 31 January 1997.

Mr. D. P. McLaughlan

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to reply to the letter of 13 June from the hon. Member for Aylesbury enclosing correspondence from Mr. D. P. McLaughlan of Princes Risborough. [7038]

Mrs. Browning: I replied to the letter of 13 June from the hon. Member for Aylesbury, enclosing correspondence from Mr. D. P. McLaughlan of Princes Risborough, on 9 December 1996.

BSE

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the estimated direct cost to United Kingdom public funds in the 1996–97 financial year of dealing with the BSE crisis; and what is the estimated provision for 1997–98, taking account of claw back on European Community assistance. [7358]

Mr. Boswell: I will write to the hon. Member with this information shortly.

Publicity

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what promotional and public information campaigns his Department is *(a)* currently running and *(b)* planning to run during the next six months; and for each campaign (i) how much it will cost, (1) in total and (2) to his Department, (ii) what agencies or bodies are undertaking the work and (iii) what is its planned duration. [7408]

Mr. Boswell: MAFF's planned public information campaign for the financial year 1996–97 and the projected costs are as follows:

	£
Food Safety and Healthy Eating	1,377,000
Animal Health and Welfare (excluding 'BSE')	526,000
Environmentally Sensitive Areas	131,000
Countryside Stewardship	115,000
'Balance in the Countryside'	90,000
Prevention of Agricultural Pollution	139,000
Research Policy Co-ordination	35,000
CAP and other Scheme Literature	680,000
International Relations and Export Promotion	350,000
Market Task Force	30,000
Speciality Food Producers	58,000
Plant Health and Horticulture	199,000
Flood and Coastal Defence	28,000
Alternative Crops	48,000
Personal Imports	150,000
Rabies	135,000
General Environmental Information	408,000
Agricultural Events	168,000

The work is undertaken by specialist contractors from the private sector who are commissioned and project managed by the Department's information division.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much his Department has spent on promotional or public information campaigns in each of the last five years; and how much he estimates will be spent on these campaigns during the (i) current and (ii) next financial years. [7540]

Mr. Boswell: Expenditure on public information campaigns by the Department in each of the last five financial years, and estimates for the current and next financial years are as follows:

1991–92: £4,094,000

1992–93: £4,217,000

1993–94: £4,312,000

1994–95: £4,800,000

1995–96: £4,738,000

1996–97: £4,667,000

1997–98[1]: £4,416,000

[1] Estimates.

Mammalian Meat and Bonemeal (Transport)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received concerning potential cross-contamination from the transport of mammalian meat and bonemeal in vehicles that are also used to transport grain; and if he will make a statement. [7946]

Mrs. Browning: We have received no such representations. Regulation 14 of the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Order 1996 requires any vehicle used to transport mammalian meat and bonemeal, or material containing mammalian meat and bonemeal, to be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected as soon as possible after the transport ceases and in any event before the vehicle is used for any other purpose.

Sheep Dips (Pollution)

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the cases of pollution resulting from the misuse of synthetic pyrethroid sheep dips which have been notified to *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Environment Agency within the past 12 months. [7802]

Mrs. Browning: There is no requirement to notify my Department of pollution incidents from sheep dips. Statistics on water pollution are published annually by the Environment Agency. The latest report, "Water Pollution Incidents in England and Wales 1995", shows that there were very few incidents of pollution from sheep dip in that year. These figures do not distinguish between pollution from synthetic pyrethroids or other sheep dips. Figures for 1996 are not yet available.

Organophosphate Poisoning

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many notified cases of organophosphate poisoning have been reported to his Department; and if he will make a statement. [7912]

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reports of the appraisal panel for human suspected adverse reactions to veterinary medicines which are available in the Library of the House. Any cases of poisoning by agricultural pesticides other than veterinary medicines are reported to the pesticides incidents appraisal panel of the Health and Safety Executive.

Cattle Cull

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress with proposals for the future selective cull. [7914]

Mr. Baldry: The Government announced on 19 September that they would not proceed for the present with the selective cull of cattle in relation to BSE.

The decision was taken in the light of interim research findings, reported in July, in which a higher proportion of the offspring of BSE cases themselves developed BSE than a similar group of cattle which were not the offspring of BSE cases. Further analysis of that study is being undertaken. Also, the analysis published by Professor Roy Anderson and his team at Oxford university in August indicated that the epidemic will virtually die out around 2001 irrespective of any further measures, that the targeting in the original cull proposal could be improved, and that there might be other possible approaches.

This does not mean that the Government have abandoned the selective cull. The cull options will be reconsidered after further consideration of the latest scientific developments, and in the light of progress with relaxing export restrictions in relation to herds which can be certified to have had no history of BSE.

BSE (Maternal Transmission)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the scientific evidence concerning maternal transmission of BSE; and if he will make a statement. [7979]

Mrs. Browning: The Minister received advice from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee—SEAC—on the interim results of a comparative trial of cattle on 29 July. This indicated that there was evidence of maternal transmission. However, alternative scientific views were put forward subsequently. The Minister has therefore asked SEAC to reconsider this when the final results of the trial are available in the new year.

Vegetarian Cheese

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received on the labelling of vegetarian cheese. [7843]

Mrs. Browning: The only representations that have been received on the labelling of vegetarian cheese in the last year have concerned that produced using genetic modification. As many of the letters received on genetic modification over this period have covered a wide range of issues it is not possible to give precise figures easily on the number that have mentioned the labelling of vegetarian cheese but it is estimated to be fewer than 25.

Departmental Expenditure

Sir Jerry Wiggin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each of the agri-environmental schemes for which his Department is responsible, (i) actual expenditure in 1992–93, 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96, (ii) provision and estimated outturn of expenditure in 1996–97 and (iii) planned expenditure in 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000, distinguishing in each case between *(a)* payments to farmers, *(b)* running costs and *(c)* monitoring costs. [8007]

Mr. Boswell: Details are contained in the following tables. It is not possible at this stage to make forward projections of running or monitoring costs.

(a) Payments to Land Managers

£000

	Actual				*Provision*[1]	*Estimate*[2]		*Planned*[1]	
	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*		*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
ESA[4]	10,900	16,500	20,100	29,100	37,020	31,803	33,690	37,708	41,190
NSA[5]	—	—	—	2,375	6,100	3,645	4,740	5,700	6,050
CSS[6]	—	—	—	—	12,225	12,225	17,650	21,900	27,400
HS[7]	—	—	—	950	2,000	1,420	1,820	1,880	1,910
MS[8]	—	—	—	—	350	104	252	378	462
OAS[9]	—	—	26	270	455	406	846	1,092	1,212
CAS[10]	—	—	—	50	2,500	80	120	120	120

(b) Running Costs

£000

	Actual				Provision[1]	Estimate[2]
	1992–1993	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–1997*	
ESA[4]	7,505	7,968	7,124	7,053	5,729	5,729
NSA[5]	—	—	1,116	1,106	761	753
CSS[6]	—	—	—	—	4,647	4,850
HS[7]	—	—	745	569	540	440
MS[8]	—	—	—	419	418	340
OAS[9]	—	—	97	130	127	127
CAS[10]	—	—	363	223	253	230

(c) Monitoring Costs

£000

	Actual				Provision[1]	Estimate[2]
	1992–1993	*1993–1994*	*1994–1995*	*1995–1996*	*1996–1997*	
ESA[4]	3,603	4,244	2,871	3,318	2,266	2,266
NSA[5]	—	—	938	665	563	563
CSS[6]	—	—	—	—	—	—
HS[7]	—	—	39	205	190	182
MS[8]	—	—	—	—	50	50
OAS[9]	—	—	170	70	70	70
CAS[10]	—	—	—	25	36	16

[1] Planned (1995 PES provision).
[2] Current estimated expenditure.
[3] Planned (1996 PES provision).
[4] Environmentally Sensitive Areas.
[5] Nitrate Sensitive Areas (under the agri-environment regulation).
[6] Countryside Stewardship Scheme (operated by the Countryside Commission until 31 March 1996).
[7] Habitat Scheme.
[8] Moorland Scheme.
[9] Organic Aid Scheme.
[10] Countryside Access Scheme.

French Fishermen

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under what statutory provision the United Kingdom is permitted to suspend concessions for French fishermen fishing in United Kingdom waters. [7790]

Mr. Baldry: The rights of access of French fishing vessels to fish in United Kingdom waters are contained in Council regulation (EEC) No. 3760/92. Article 6 and annex 1 of this regulation set out particular access rights in the coastal waters of the United Kingdom between six and 12 miles. These access rights are given statutory effect in the Fishing Boat (European Economic Community) Designation Order 1983, as amended. They could not be unilaterally suspended without the United Kingdom being in breach of its international obligations.

Genetically-engineered Tomatoes

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received on the labelling of genetically-engineered tomatoes. [7844]

Mrs. Browning: As many of the letters received on genetic modification over the last year have covered a wide range of issues it is not possible to give precise figures easily on the number that have mentioned the labelling of genetically modified tomatoes but it is estimated to be fewer than 25.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what discussions she has had with the Treasury in respect of the proposed changes to early retirement provisions for teachers. [7105]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend discusses all issues that have a significant impact on public spending with the Treasury.

National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many national vocational qualifications have been awarded to individuals assessed at an overseas award centre. [6934]

Mr. Paice: Data are not available on the number of national vocational qualifications awarded to individuals assessed at an overseas award centre.

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Eduction and Employment how many national vocational qualifications awarded by the end of December 1995 were gained by individuals on Government training schemes. [6938]

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 28 November 1996]:* The information requested is not available. According to information from the youth training and training for work follow-up surveys, 41 per cent. of YT and 42 per cent. of TfW leavers respectively gained a full qualification in England and Wales in 1995 and a further 9 per cent. of YT and 7 per cent. of TfW leavers gained a part-qualification. Many of these will have been NVQs; however, in 1995, many predecessor qualifications were still in use.

International Labour Organisation

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the effective annual contribution of the United Kingdom to the International Labour Organisation; what assessment she has made of the benefits of the United Kingdom from membership of that organisation; and what periodic reviews of the United Kingdom's membership are conducted. [7976]

Mr. Paice: Some £9,006,587, or 5.24 per cent., of the ILO's budget, in 1996. The Government review Britain's membership of all UN agencies, including the ILO, on a regular basis.

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many complaints have been made by the International Labour Organisation against *(a)* United Kingdom trades union and employment legislation and *(b)* British companies in the last 10 years. [7975]

Mr. Paice: In the last 10 years, about 35 representations have been made to the ILO on UK trade union and employment legislation, including four on its implementation by British companies and industries. All these representations were made by the TUC. Only five of the issues concerned have been debated at the ILO conference. There have been no representations by employer organisations.

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what response she has made to the charges made by the International Labour Organisation about the alleged unfairness of United Kingdom trade union legislation; what assessment she has made of the procedures in the International Labour Organisation for examining allegations from trade unions about British employers; and what steps are taken by the United Kingdom Government to ensure that proper representations are made in response. [7977]

Mr. Paice: The Government respond fully to all comments made by the ILO supervisory bodies on their legislation through the normal reporting machinery. They have explained why they believe nothing in British law and practice is incompatible with our obligations under ratified ILO conventions. The UK has been at the forefront of moves to streamline and modernise the ILO's supervisory machinery.

Personal Services Industry

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many notified vacancies offering employment as models have been displayed by the Employment Service on a monthly average, in the last year for which figures are available; and if she will break down the information by region; [7988]

(2) how many notified vacancies offering employment in sauna baths, massage parlours, escort and kissogram agencies have been displayed by the Employment Service, on a monthly average, in the last year for which figures are available; and if she will break down the information by region; [7989]

(3) how many notified vacancies offering employment in the personal services industry have been refused or withdrawn by the Employment Service due to concerns of taste or decency expressed by staff or clients; [7990]

(4) how many jobseeker's directives have been issued to clients who have refused notified vacancies in the personal services industry; [7991]

(5) how many clients have had their jobseeker's allowance refused or reduced for refusing to take up a notified vacancy in the personal services industry. [7992]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 10 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to write to you direct about your questions of 4 December concerning vacancies in the personal services industry, and the numbers of clients who have received jobseeker's directions, or had their Jobseekers Allowance refused or reduced, for refusing such vacancies. This falls within my responsibility as Chief Executive of the Employment Service.

You asked for information about notified vacancies offering employment as models and also those offering employment in sauna

baths, massage parlours, escort and kissogram agencies. I am afraid such information is not available.

It might be helpful if I explained that the Employment Service keeps records of vacancies notified based on the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) and Standard Industrial Classification (SIC). These form the framework for the collection and analysis of data used by the Office for National Statistics and also meet standards required by the EC Regulation.

SOC uses a structured approach to occupational classification. Occupations are identified and aggregated with reference to the similarity of qualifications, training, skills and experience commonly associated with the competent performance of constituent tasks. Variations in the tasks performed occur between one place of employment and another and consequently not all definitions can be expected to coincide exactly with specific jobs in a particular establishment or in a given locality. SIC was first introduced into the United Kingdom in 1948 for use in classifying business establishments and other statistical units by the type of economic activity in which they are engaged. The classification provides a framework for the collection, tabulation, presentation and analysis of data about economic activities. Its use promotes uniformity of data collected by various government departments and agencies. In addition it can be used for administrative purposes and by many non-government bodies as a convenient way of classifying industrial activities into a common structure.

The structure of SOC and SIC mean, I am afraid, that it is not possible to break down information in a way which would enable the particular information you are interested in to be separately identified.

On the question of notified vacancies in the personal services sector which have been withdrawn, due to concerns expressed relating to taste and decency, information of this nature is not collected. However, all Jobcentres have guidance which stipulates that they must not accept vacancies which: are illegal; would result in a breach of the law; might put jobseekers at risk. It also states that if they are notified of vacancies which require models, offer employment in sauna baths, massage parlours, escort and kissogram agencies, or other personal/telephone services special regard should be paid to the reputation of the employer. Details are sought of the establishment and conditions of training and employment, whether the hours of work or the location or interview arrangements give cause for concern, and whether there is an indication of a lack of professional standards. Jobcentres are advised that where any concerns arise about the above issues that such vacancies should be treated with caution and in any cases of doubt they should refuse to handle the vacancies. Following questions asked on 4 November by the Honourable Member for Sheffield Hillsborough about a female constituent being referred to a vacancy for an administrative assistant with a male escort agency, work is in progress to further strengthen this guidance.

The information you requested concerning the number of jobseeker's directions issued to clients who have refused notified vacancies in the personal services industry, and the number of clients who have had their Jobseeker's Allowance refused or reduced for refusing to take up such vacancies, is not available and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

Your questions on the policy in respect of the continuing payment of Jobseeker's Allowance to people who have refused to take a job in the personal services industry, and your proposed amendment to the regulations, will be answered direct by the Minister of State.

I hope this is helpful in clarifying the position.

Schools (Sheffield)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the schools for which Sheffield local education authority applied for supplementary credit approval for each of the last three years; and if she will make a statement. [8100]

Mrs. Gillan: There follows a list of the schools for which Sheffield local education authority has applied for supplementary credit approvals in the three financial years 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97:

Financial year 1994–95

Bolehill Primary
Burncross Primary
Carter Lodge Secondary
Gleadless Valley Secondary
High Green Secondary
Kettlebridge Infant
Lindsay Infant
Norfolk Primary
Park House Secondary
Shirebrook Primary
Birley Spa Primary
Brook House Junior
Crooksmoor Junior
City School
Hartley Brook Primary
Monteney Primary
Mosborough Primary
Whirlow Brook Special School

Financial year 1995–96

Brook House Junior
Derwent Schools
Firth Park Secondary
King Ecgbert Secondary
King Edward VIII Secondary
Millan Centre (Youth Club)
Silverdale Secondary
Waltheof Secondary

Financial year 1996–97

Birley Spa Primary (Schools Renewal Challenge Fund)
Waltheof School Secondary (Schools Renewal Challenge Fund)

During this period, the Government have provided capital support to Sheffield local education authority through annual capital guidelines of £10.259 million and supplementary credit approvals of £8.968 million.

Local Education Authorities (Capital Expenditure)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what discussions she has had with local authorities representatives concerning local education authorities' responsibilities for deciding capital expenditure; and if she will make a statement. [8101]

Mrs. Gillan: We discuss local education authorities spending needs for capital work with the local authority associations at official level at the service working group on education and at ministerial level at the Consultative Council on Local Government Finance.

It is for individual local education authorities to decide how to use the capital resources available to them.

Pupil Exclusions

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list, by region, the number of children excluded from school in each year for which figures are available. [8068]

Mr. Forth: Figures on permanent exclusions by region are available for the first time for the school year 1994–95. They are as follows:

	Number
North	654
Yorkshire and Humberside	953
North West	1,512
East Midlands	855
West Midlands	1,287
East Anglia	336
Greater London	2,064
Other South East	2,132
South West	876
Total	10,669

The Department will be collecting comprehensive figures for permanent exclusions in the school year 1995–96 as part of the annual schools census in January. These figures will be available later in 1997.

Schools Renewal Challenge Fund

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the local authorities which have applied for funding under the schools renewal challenge fund. [8099]

Mrs. Gillan: One hundred local education authorities have submitted bids for funding from the schools renewal challenge fund. The following list sets out these authorities alphabetically.

Schools renewal challenge fund 1996–97: LEA bids

Barnsley
Bath and North East Somerset
Bedfordshire
Berkshire
Bexley
Birmingham
Bolton
Bradford
Buckinghamshire
Bury
Calderdale
Cambridgeshire
Cheshire
City of Bristol
City of Kingston upon Hull
Cornwall
Coventry
Croydon
Cumbria
Derbyshire
Devon
Doncaster
Dorset
Dudley
Durham
Ealing
East Sussex
Enfield
Essex
Gateshead
Gloucestershire
Greenwich
Hackney
Hampshire
Haringey
Harrow
Hartlepool
Havering
Hereford and Worcester
Hertfordshire
Hounslow
Isle of Wight
Islington
Kensington and Chelsea
Kent
Kingston upon Thames
Kirklees
Lambeth
Lancashire
Leeds
Leicestershire
Lewisham
Liverpool
Manchester
Merton
Newcastle upon Tyne
Newham
Northamptonshire
North East Lincolnshire
North Lincolnshire
North Somerset
North Tyneside
Northumberland
North Yorkshire
Nottinghamshire
Oldham
Oxfordshire
Redcar and Cleveland
Richmond upon Thames
Rochdale
Rotherham
St. Helen's
Salford
Sandwell
Sheffield
Shropshire
Solihull
Somerset
South Tyneside
Southwark
Staffordshire

Stockport
Suffolk
Sunderland
Surrey
Sutton
Tameside
Tower Hamlets
Trafford
Wakefield
Walsall
Waltham Forest
Wandsworth
Westminster
West Sussex
Wigan
Wiltshire
Wirral
Wolverhampton
York

Student Union Membership

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the cost to HM Government of carrying out the provisions of the Education Act 1994 concerning students opting out of membership of student unions. [7396]

Mr. Forth: There have been no direct costs to Government from the implementation of the provisions of the Education Act 1994. It is the responsibility of the governing body of a higher or further education institution to take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure that the requirement concerning the right of a student not to be a union member is observed by, or in relation to, a students' union.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will estimate the cost to student unions of implementing the provisions of the Education Act 1994 concerning students opting out of membership. [7397]

Mr. Forth: Such an estimate cannot be provided. Information on student unions' costs is not collected centrally.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students have opted out of membership of student unions under the terms of the Education Act 1994 in each student union. [7398]

Mr. Forth: This information is not available as it is not collected centrally.

Small Firms Initiative

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total Government expenditure on the small firms initiative in each year of the programme's operation; and if she will make a statement on the programme. [8220]

Mr. Paice: Total expenditure on skills for small businesses in 1995–96 was £6.178 million. Expenditure in 1996–97 currently stands at £5.924 million. Skills for small businesses was established as a three-year initiative. Following a comprehensive Government review, this initiative will be absorbed into the local competitiveness budget from April 1997. This will provide wide-ranging advice and support to local firms by training and enterprise councils and business links.

Job Training

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total Government expenditure in 1995–96 prices on *(a)* the youth training scheme, *(b)* youth training, including youth credits, modern apprenticeships and accelerated modern apprenticeships, *(c)* the direct training service, *(d)* local initiative funds and *(e)* the former job training scheme for each year of their operation up to the latest year for which data are available. [8221]

Mr. Paice: The information requested is given in the following tables:

Youth training scheme

Year[1]	*Expenditure (£ million)*	*Expenditure at 1995–96 prices (£ million)*
1983–84	426.80	752.20
1984–85	836.20	1,403.20
1985–86	869.90	1,383.90
1986–87	939.10	1,450.20
1987–88	1,064.90	1,561.30
1988–89	993.20	1,364.90
1989–90	976.00	1,253.70

[1] Expenditure is for Great Britain.

Youth training (including youth credits, modern apprenticeships and accelerated modern apprenticeships

Year[1]	*Expenditure (£ million)*	*Expenditure at 1995–96 prices (£ million)*
1990–91	823.40	979.40
1991–92	746.30	834.30
1992–93	617.00	661.90
1993–94	640.10	667.30
1994–95	647.00	662.70
1995–96 (provisional)	634.70	634.70

[1] Expenditure for 1990–91 is for Great Britain. Expenditure for 1991–92 is for England and Wales and expenditure from 1992–93 is for England only.

Direct Training Service[1]

Year[2]	*Expenditure (£ million)*	*Expenditure at 1995–96 prices (£ million)*
1970–71	18.70	151.80
1971–72	22.70	168.90
1972–73	35.50	244.20
1973–74	49.70	319.90
1974–75	58.20	313.10
1975–76	118.60	508.70
1976–77	183.50	693.40
1977–78	197.10	655.60
1978–79	208.90	625.00
1979–80	229.40	588.10

Direct Training Service[1]

Year[2]	*Expenditure (£ million)*	*Expenditure at 1995–96 prices (£ million)*
1980–81	246.30	533.60
1981–82	235.10	464.40

[1] The figures for Direct Training Services include expenditure for the TOPS programme which cannot now be disaggregated.
[2] Expenditure is for Great Britain.

Local Initiative Fund

Year[1]	*Expenditure (£ million)*	*Expenditure at 1995–96 prices (£ million)*
1990–91	9.90	11.80
1991–92	48.20	53.90
1992–93	49.70	53.30
1993–94	47.70	49.70

[1] Expenditure for 1990–91 is for Great Britain. Expenditure in 1991–92 is for England and Wales and expenditure from 1992–93 is for England only.

Job training programme[1]

Year[2]	*Expenditure (£ million)*	*Expenditure at 1995–96 prices (£ million)*
1982–83	311.10	573.70
1983–84	240.70	424.20
1984–85	232.90	390.80
1985–86	219.40	349.00
1986–87	286.20	442.00
1987–88	272.30	399.20

[1] The figures given are for the job training programme and include expenditure on the old job training scheme which cannot now be disaggregated. The job training programme was the generic name which covered a range of separate programmes including the old job training scheme.
[2] Expenditure is for Great Britain.

Careers Libraries

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total Government expenditure on careers libraries, in each year since their establishment; and if she will make a statement on the declared aims of the careers libraries. [8222]

Mr. Paice: The total annual Government expenditure on the careers library initiative, excluding value added tax, since its implementation is as follows:

1992–93: £6.283 million

1993–94: £5.984 million

1994–95: £1.488 million

1995–96: £1.345 million (provisional)

1996–97: £1.515 million (planned)

The aim of the careers library initiative is to equip secondary schools and colleges with up-to-date careers libraries and computerised information.

Employment Schemes (Geographical Mobility)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total Government expenditure on incorporating geographical mobility into *(a)* the employment transfer scheme, *(b)* the free forwards fares scheme and *(c)* the job search scheme in each year of their operation. [8224]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Frank Field, dated 10 December 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the total government expenditure on incorporating geographical mobility into the employment transfer scheme, the free forwards fares scheme and the job search scheme in each year of their operation. This falls within my responsibility as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The Employment Transfer Scheme (ETS), Free Forward Fares Scheme (FFFS) and Job Search Scheme (JSS) were the three geographical mobility schemes, operated by the Manpower Services Commission and were replaced in 1986 by the Travel to Interview Scheme (TIS).

We have no records of expenditure prior to the 1987–88 financial year when the Employment Service came into being. Expenditure on TIS, which became the responsibility of the Employment Service in that year, since then has been:

Year	*£ million*
1987–88	0.5
1988–89	1.0
1989–90	0.7
1990–91	0.6
1991–92	0.9
1992–93	1.5
1993–94	1.7
1994–95	1.8
1995–96	1.7

I hope this is helpful.

Careers Officer Training

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total Government expenditure on the careers officer training grants programme, administered by the Department of Employment, in each year of the programme's operation; and if she will make a statement on the programme. [8225]

Mr. Paice: The careers officer training grants programme administered by the Department of Employment started in 1981. Figures for expenditure on the programme are not available before 1989–90. However, expenditure in subsequent years is as follows:

1989–90: £550,000

1990–91: £560,000

1991–92: £580,000

1992–93: £645,000

1993–94: £600,000

1994–95: £695,000

1995–96: £1.5 million

The Department for Education and Employment has continued to fund expenditure on this programme.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of the

individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8542]

Mr. Robin Squire: Before 1 April 1996, no central record was maintained of the sources of names of appointees. Since that date, two appointees have been identified by the public appointments unit.

Education Standards

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the standards of education achieved *(a)* in Britain and *(b)* in other countries for which she holds comparable figures. [8340]

Mr. Robin Squire: The UK has more detailed and comprehensive systems to measure standards achieved by pupils than any other country. These show that standards in the UK have risen significantly over recent years, and continue to do so. For example, one in three young people now proceeds to higher education, and the vast majority of 16-year-olds continue in full-time education or training: whereas 15 years ago, the figures were respectively one in eight, and one half.

Cross-national comparisons of educational standards are difficult, given the problems of definition and measurement. Some relevant data are given in the annual OECD publication, "Education at a Glance". This shows the UK to be in the middle of the range of OECD countries on most of the 45 indicators.

Earlier this year, the Government's skills audit examined the performance of four comparator countries: France, Germany, Singapore and the USA. The study highlighted that the UK needs to do more to address literacy, numeracy and other key skills, and to raise achievement at levels 2 and 3; and the Government are already taking appropriate action.

A recent report of the third international mathematics and science study compares the performance of 13-year-olds in England in science—where we do well—and mathematics—where we need to improve—with that of pupils in other countries. Further reports on the performance of nine-year-olds are to be produced later in 1997.

All these reports can be found in the Library.

Special Educational Needs Tribunal

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the 1995–96 annual report of the president of the special educational needs tribunal will be published; and if she will make a statement. [8701]

Mrs. Gillan: The report has been published today, and copies have been placed in the Library.

I very much welcome the report. It demonstrates clearly that the special educational needs tribunal has continued, and improved on, its record in meeting the targets it was set for dealing with appeals.

The tribunal provides a unique and valuable mechanism for considering appeals and the needs of children are at the heart of its consideration. It has gained a deserved reputation for impartiality, informality and, above all, fairness. This was the basis on which it was established and it is a tribute to the professionalism of the tribunal's members and staff that they have managed to achieve this.

I applaud the hard work of the tribunal president, members and staff. A great deal has been achieved in the last year. I am confident that the tribunal will continue to build on its excellent record.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Sir Peter Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress CEWTEC, Hampshire TEC, METROTEC, Wight Training and Enterprise, Wiltshire TEC, ELTEC, training and enterprise councils and Sussex Enterprise are making in meeting the criteria for the award of a licence. [8786]

Mr. Paice: I am pleased to announce the award of a licence to CEWTEC, Hampshire TEC, METROTEC, Wight Training and Enterprise, Wiltshire TEC, and Sussex Enterprise. When ELTEC has an operational business link, which must be in place before the end of March 1997, it will have met all of the criteria and will be awarded a licence.

Employment Service Pens

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much the Employment Service agency has spent on pens carrying the slogan, "Job Centre—The Right People For The Job"; which company produced the pens; how many were produced; how they have been distributed; and what other promotional items have been produced by the agency during this period. [8042]

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Brian Donohoe, dated 10 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question concerning the production of and expenditure on promotional items by the Employment Service (ES). This falls within my responsibility as Chief Executive of the Agency.

There are no centrally produced or widely available promotional items. Each ES region, together with Wales and Scotland, has a devolved budget for local marketing activities, including promotional items. I have consulted my regional marketing managers to be able to reply to your questions.

On the issue of the pens carrying the slogan 'Jobcentre—The right people for the job', this was produced for use in the Ayrshire North district. Castle Sales supplied 150 pens at a cost of £555. These were distributed to employers attending an event to launch an Employer's Charter in October 1996. This Charter was the culmination of work undertaken by my people in Ayrshire North to encourage employers to use the seven local Jobcentres to meet their recruitment needs.

Promotional items are used sparingly and represent a small proportion of the overall budgets for marketing and publicity purposes. Because responsibilities and budgets are devolved to local managers I am afraid it is not possible for me to identify any other offices who may also have commissioned a promotional pen similar to the Ayrshire North example. The total amount of the devolved marketing budget for 1995/96 is £2.9m. This covers all aspects of marketing Employment Service products and services to both employers and jobseekers at local level.

On the issue of other promotional items, my regional marketing managers produce a range of promotional items to meet specific targeted marketing needs. These include pens, coasters, rulers, year planners, mousemats and carrier bags and are used to inform employers and jobseekers of the benefits of using Jobcentres and to encourage participation in Employment Service programmes. They are used at employer marketing events such as conferences and exhibitions in the main.

I hope this is helpful.

TREASURY

Employment Statistics

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the average tenure in a job for an employee, broken down by ethnic group, in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1996; [6652]

(2) what was the proportion of employees, broken down by ethnic group, who had been with their current employer for *(a)* over three months and *(b)* over a year in (i) 1992 and (ii) 1996. [6651]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Judith Church, dated 10 December 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent questions (6651 and 6652) on the tenure in jobs for employees in 1992 and 1996 broken down by ethnic group.

The available information is shown in the attached table.

Employees' tenure in current job by ethnic group (Great Britain)

Ethnic groups	Spring 1992 Percentage of employees with tenure of at least: 3 months	1 year	Spring 1996 Percentage of employees with tenure of at least: 3 months	1 year	Average length of time in current job[1] Months
All ethnic groups	96	84	95	81	93
White	96	84	95	81	94
Non-white:	95	81	94	76	72
Black	96	82	95	77	76
Indian	95	82	92	69	77
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	94	77	94	76	49
Mixed/other	96	80	100	90	71

[1] Not available for 1992.

Source:
Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.

Ms Church: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the breakdown, by ethnic group, of people who sought a permanent job but accepted a temporary job in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1996; [6650]

(2) what was the breakdown, by ethnic group, of people who sought a full-time job but accepted a part-time job in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1996. [6647]

Mrs. Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked for him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Ms Judith Church, dated 10 December 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent questions (6647 and 6650) on part-time workers who could not find a full-time job and temporary employees who could not find a permanent job in 1992 and 1996, broken down by ethnic group.

The available information is shown in the attached tables.

People[1] working part-time because they could not find a full-time job, by ethnic group (Great Britain)

Ethnic groups	Number (thousands) Spring 1992	Spring 1996	As percentage of all working part-time[2] Spring 1992	Spring 1996
All ethnic groups	619	782	11	13
White	574	714	11	12
Non-white	44	68	26	28
Black	19	23	31	28
Indian	10	16	18	24
Pakistan/Bangladeshi	[3]—	15	[3]—	45
Mixed/other	[3]—	13	[3]—	24

Notes:
[1] Employees and self employed.
[2] Percentage based on total responding to question about reasons for working part-time.
[3] Sample size too small for a reliable estimate.

Source:
Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.

Employees in temporary employment because they could not find a permanent job, by ethnic group (Great Britain)

Ethnic groups	Number (thousands) Spring 1992	Number (thousands) Spring 1996	As percentage of all working part-time[1] Spring 1992	As percentage of all working part-time[1] Spring 1996
All ethnic groups	436	649	36	42
White	408	602	36	41
Non-white:	28	46	44	49
Black	[2]—	15	[2]—	52
Indian	11	11	50	41
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	—	10	[2]—	67
Mixed/other	—	10	[2]—	42

Notes:
[1] Percentage based on total responding to question about reasons for working temporarily.
[2] Sample sizes too small for a reliable estimate.
Source:
Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics.

Private Landlords (Housing Benefit)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the annual amount of social security paid to private landlords via housing benefit; and what is the estimated amount of income tax *(a)* payable on that benefit, *(b)* improperly withheld and *(c)* actually paid. [7201]

Mr. Jack: Precise figures are not available but it is estimated that, in 1995–96, some £1.9 billion of housing benefit was paid directly to private landlords—that is, individuals and companies–excluding housing associations. Information on the effect on income tax liabilities of this part of the income of private landlords is not available.

"Financial Statement and Budget Report"

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide the information set out in table 5.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" for projects where contracts have been signed. [7224]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 2 December 1996]:* The information required is as follows:

Private finance initiative: estimated capital spending arising from signed deals

£ million

	1997—98	1998–99	1999–2000	Total
Defence	30	30	30	90
FCO/ODA	0	0	0	0
Agriculture	0	0	0	0
Trade and Industry[1]	0	0	0	0
Transport	950	1,130	1,140	3,220
Education and Employment[2,3]	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—
Environment[4]	60	20	20	100
Home Office	110	0	0	110
Legal Departments	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—
National Heritage	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	10
Health	60	40	20	120
Social Security[1]	70	60	20	160
Scotland[5]	10	10	10	30

Private finance initiative: estimated capital spending arising from signed deals

£ million

	1997—98	1998–99	1999–2000	Total
Wales	[7]—	[7]—	[7]—	10
Northern Ireland	0	0	0	0
Chancellor's Department	0	0	0	0
Local Authorities [6]	0	0	0	0
Total	1,300	1,300	1,240	3,850

[1] Joint Benefits Agency/Post Office Counters project recorded against social security.
[2] Excludes private finance activity in education institutions classified to the private sector.
[3] PFI activity in local authority schools is included in the local authorities line.
[4] In addition, substantial private investment is levered in through housing, urban regeneration and other programmes.
[5] Includes Forestry Commission.
[6] PFI contracts in the local government sector which qualify for special credit approvals.
[7] Less than £10 million.

Single Currency Stability Pact

Sir George Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons his letter sent to hon. Members relating to the proposed single currency stability pact, the contents of which were made public on 22 November, was posted to the hon. Member for Reigate on Monday 25 November, by second class post. [7025]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 2 December 1996]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply of 4 December at column *652*.

British Artists (Germany)

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with German Treasury Ministers about the tax treatment of British artists appearing in Germany. [7672]

Mr. Jack: Discussions have not been held on the specific issue of UK resident artists appearing in Germany. Germany imposes tax at a rate of 25 per cent. from the gross payments made to non-resident entertainers. However, Germany has confirmed that artists performing in Germany may apply for an income tax assessment by submitting a tax return at the end of the tax year to take into account the actual expenses they have incurred.

Taxation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the value in constant 1996 prices of an increase of one penny in 1995–96 income tax for each of the tax rates and in total from *(a)* each of the 22 unitary authorities in Wales, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* the United Kingdom in (i) 1996–97 and (ii) 1997–98 indicating in each case the percentage of additional tax raised. [7458]

Mr. Jack: It is not possible to provide a reliable breakdown below United Kingdom level for 1995–96. The latest available information is for 1994–95. The full year yield from a 1p increase in each of the tax rates under the 1994–95 tax regime and at 1994–95 income levels is given in the table. The overall yield from increasing all of the tax rates by 1p represents about 4 per cent. of the total income tax liabilities of individuals in that year.

Full year yield under the 1994–95 tax regime and at 1994–95 income levels (£ million)

	Increase lower rate by 1p	*Increase basic rate by 1p*	*Increase higher rate by 1p*
Wales	30	70	10
United Kingdom	690	1,700	410

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost incurred by each Government Department in answering parliamentary questions in the last parliamentary session. [7521]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information is given in the table for the Session 1995–96:

	£
Department of Health	424,942
Home Office	324,794
Department of Transport	307,020
Department of the Environment	296,592
Department of Trade and Industry	286,839
Ministry of Defence	271,580
Welsh Office	260,658
Department for Education and Employment	260,496
Scottish Office	253,189
Department of Social Security	248,711
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	244,544
Cabinet Office[1]	222,952
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	195,972
Treasury	195,040
Northern Ireland Office	171,654

[1] Includes questions answered by the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

The estimated costs are based upon average costs calculated by the Treasury for April 1996 as £107 for answering a written parliamentary question and £249 for an oral parliamentary question. Information on the number of questions answered by each Government Department has been obtained from the parliamentary online information system database. Equivalent information for the House of Lords is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what change there has been in public sector capital investment since the private finance initiative was introduced. [7725]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 5 December 1996]:* Public sector capital expenditure and capital expenditure under the private finance initiative are both shown in table 5.4, on page 99, of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report".

Tourism (Wales)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the income derived from taxation on tourism services in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [7917]

Mr. Jack: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Petrol and Diesel

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average weekly expenditure in 1995–96 on *(a)* petrol and *(b)* diesel for households owning a car where the household composition was that of one man and one woman with two children, by each decile group. [7825]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr Alan Milburn, dated 10 December 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the average weekly household expenditure in 1995–96 on petrol and diesel for a particular housenold composition.

Estimates from the Family Expenditure Survey (FES) for expenditure on petrol by this type of household with at least one car or van are shown in the attached table. Average spending on diesel was estimated to have been £1.80 per week in 1995–96; the sample is not large enough to provide reliable estimates by income decile group. The figures are subject to sampling variations and have been rounded to the nearest 10 pence.

Family expenditure survey 1995–96 Expenditure by one man and one woman households with two children which have at least one car/van

	Lowest ten per cent.	*Second decile group*	*Third decile group*	*Fourth decile group*	*Fifth decile group*	*Sixth decile group*	*Seventh decile group*	*Eighth decile group*	*Ninth decile group*	*Highest ten per cent.*	*All households*
Lower boundary of group (£)		235	330	378	416	473	540	615	707	899	
Number of households	67	66	67	66	67	66	67	66	67	66	665

Family expenditure survey 1995–96 Expenditure by one man and one woman households with two children which have at least one car/van

	Lowest ten per cent.	Second decile group	Third decile group	Fourth decile group	Fifth decile group	Sixth decile group	Seventh decile group	Eighth decile group	Ninth decile group	Highest ten per cent.	All households
	Average weekly household expenditure (£)										
Petrol	11.50	11.30	13.10	14.60	13.70	12.70	14.70	16.30	15.60	15.30	13.90
Percentage standard error	10.3	9.7	11.8	6.9	10.8	9.4	9.8	8.8	8.2	12.0	3.1

Source:
ONS, Family Expenditure Survey 1995–96. © Crown copyright 1996.

Self-assessment

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what basis he has calculated the latest figure for savings estimated to the Inland Revenue from the introduction of self-assessment. [8273]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* The estimated savings from the introduction of self-assessment are calculated on the basis set out in the Green Book, and are part of a cost-benefit analysis.

Computers

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated total cost *(a)* to business, *(b)* to businesses with under 100 employees and *(c)* to businesses with under 10 employees of reprogramming computer software to accommodate new P60 and P14 forms. [5441]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 25 November 1996]:* Costs arise only where employers choose to use substitute forms in place of the official versions which are supplied free of charge by the Inland Revenue. Although we do not keep the information in the form requested we feel that, overall, costs are negligible.

Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* cases of and *(b)* deaths from malignant non-Hodgkin's lymphoma have been recorded in England in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [6224]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 27 November 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 10 December 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to your recent question on how many cases of, and deaths from the malignant non-Hodgkin's lymphoma have been recorded in each of the last five years.

The figures for England are given in the attached table.

National data on the incidence of cancer are not yet available for more recent years. The process of cancer registration is complex and takes time; the fastest of the regional registries in England and Wales takes about 2 years to achieve 90% completeness. National figures cannot be produced until data for the last of the regional registries have been received. Over the past five years a great deal of work has been done to try to improve timeliness without sacrificing quality and completeness. Several registries have introduced new computer systems, and ONS has redeveloped its processing. Once the new systems are up and running figures will be produced more quickly.

Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma[1] 1987–95

Year	Cases	Deaths
1987	5,241	3,023
1988	5,891	3,243
1989	5,639	3,278
1990	[2]5,421	3,355
1991	[2]6,166	3,470
1992	—	3,583
1993	—	3,544
1994	—	3,591
1995	—	3,727

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision, codes 200 and 201.
[2] provisional figures only.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Expenditure Allocations

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the allocation to individual programmes in Northern Ireland of the public expenditure totals announced on 26 November. [8648]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: In his Budget Statement on 26 November, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced total public expenditure planning figures for the Northern Ireland programme. I have now decided on the allocations to individual programmes as shown in the following table. Copies of a more detailed statement have been placed in the Library. These allocations reflect my assessment of how best to distribute the Northern Ireland public expenditure totals in response to local needs and circumstances.

£ million

Programme	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000
Northern Ireland Office			
Law, Order, Protective and Miscellaneous Services	934	920	930
Northern Ireland Departments			
Northern Ireland Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Services and Support	148	130	130
Industry, Trade, Energy and Employment	550	530	500
Roads and Transport	172	170	170
Housing	243	240	240

£ million

Programme	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000
Environmental and Miscellaneous Services	226	190	180
Law, Order and Protective Services (Fire Service)	44	40	40
Education, Arts and Libraries	1,376	1,380	1,400
Health and Personal Social Services	1,642	1,670	1,690
Social Security Administration	158	160	160
Other Public Services	59	60	60
NI Block (excluding Social Security Benefits)	5,553	5,500	5,500
Social Security Benefits	2,494	2,590	2,700
NI Block	8,046	8,090	8,190
National Agriculture and Fisheries Support	175	170	170
NI Programme	8,222	8,260	8,360

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest £1 million in 1997–98 and to the nearest £10 million in 1998–99 and 1999–2000.

2. The figures for 1997–98 will form the basis for preparation by Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office of Main Estimates for the coming year. These will be presented to Parliament in due course.

3. The Education and Block totals are reduced to reflect the NI share of proceeds from the proposed sale of student loans debt. This reduction does not affect Block spending power.

4. Allocations from the EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme are included in the figures above.

Quangos

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those persons sitting on *(a)* two, *(b)* three, *(c)* four, *(d)* five and *(e)* six or more quangos; what salary or allowances each is paid; and by what means each was appointed. [5836]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested about individuals holding two or more appointments on Northern Ireland public bodies has been placed in the Library of the House. These appointments are made by Departments with the approval of the relevant Minister. To identify the remuneration paid to each person listed would incur disproportionate costs; however, remuneration levels are given in the Cabinet Office publication "Public Appointments 1995", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Public Bodies

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the people he has appointed to non-departmental public bodies since 30 April, together with the bodies concerned. [5837]

Sir John Wheeler: As the information requested is lengthy, it has been placed in the Library.

President Robinson (Visits)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what advice he has given to President Mary Robinson about visits to Northern Ireland in 1996; through which channels; and if he will make a statement. [7186]

Sir John Wheeler: The Secretary of State has not offered any advice to President Robinson about visits to Northern Ireland this year.

Judicial Review

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps the Chief Constable has taken to explain and communicate to all members of the RUC their responsibilities and the implications arising from the judgment in the matter of the application for judicial review by John William Alexander Stewart. [6093]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 4 December 1996]:* Both applications for judicial review in this case were dismissed on 12 January 1995.

Members of the RUC are expected to be aware of instructions and regulations dealing with the standards of conduct required of them; no changes in these instructions and regulations were required by the terms of the judgment.

Seat Belts

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* drivers and *(b)* passengers have been prosecuted for not wearing seat belts in the (i) front seats and (ii) back seats of vehicles in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [8208]

Sir John Wheeler: The figures refer to persons proceeded against for either a primary or secondary offence at high and low courts. It is not possible to distinguish between drivers and passengers.

(i) *Failing to wear front seat belt*

1991: 1,379

1992: 1,409

1993: 1,306

1994: 1,131

1995: 1,096

(ii) *Failing to wear rear seat belt*

1991: 0

1992: 8

1993: 39

1994: 26

1995: 38

Agri-environmental Schemes

Sir Jerry Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each of the agri-environmental schemes for which his Department is responsible, (i) actual expenditure in 1992–93, 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96, (ii) provision and estimated outturn of expenditure in 1996–97 and (iii) planned expenditure in 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000, distinguishing in each case between *(a)* payments to farmers, *(b)* running costs and *(c)* monitoring costs. [8010]

Mr. Ancram: The details are contained in the following tables. It is not possible at this stage to make forward projections of running or monitoring costs.

Payments to Farmers

£000

	Actual				*Prov*[1]	*Est*[2]	*Planned*[3]	*Expenditure*	
	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*		*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*
Schemes									
EAS[4]	465	586	527	1,609	4,236	4,237	4,710	5,103	5,671
HIS[5]	—	—	—	—	—	—	349	349	349
MS[6]	—	—	—	—	—	—	349	349	349
OAS[7]	—	—	—	—	—	—	59	59	59
CAS[8]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	179	239
Running costs									
ESA[4]	175	352	492	747		768			
HIS[5]	—	—	—	—					
MS[6]	—	—	—	—					
OAS[7]	—	—	—	—					
CAS[8]	—	—	—	—					
Monitoring costs									
EAS[4]	43	74	81	100	100	39			
HIS[5]	—	—	—	—					
MS[6]	—	—	—	—					
OAS[7]	—	—	—	—					
CAS[8]	—	—	—	—					

[1] Planned (1995 PES Provision).
[2] Current estimated expenditure.
[3] Planned (1996 PES provision).
[4] Environmentally sensitive areas.
[5] Habitat improvement scheme.
[6] Moorland scheme.
[7] Organic aid scheme.
[8] Countryside access scheme.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8540]

Sir John Wheeler: None of the individuals appointed to public bodies in Northern Ireland during 1996 were persons identified by the public appointments unit.

Low Impact Development

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment his Department has made of the capacity of the planning system to accommodate low impact development; and if he will make a statement. [3357]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Planning Service under its chief executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Mr. Martyn Jones, dated 10 December 1996:

As you know, Mr. Moss recently asked me to write to you in reply to a number of Questions which you had raised in the House. My letters of 13 November 1996 addressed Questions 1650, 1651, 1652, 1653, 1654 and 1655, however, the letter sent in reply to PQ 1659 was a copy of the letter sent in reply to PQ 1651. I apologise for the oversight and for any confusion this might have caused.

Your Question asked about an assessment of the capacity of the planning system to accommodate low impact development.

The Planning Service has made no such assessment. We will, however, monitor the outcome of any assessment undertaken in the rest of the United Kingdom, and assess what relevance, if any, it may have for Northern Ireland.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Offenders

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the peak age of offending for males and females in *(a)* London and *(b)* England and Wales in (i) 1979, (ii) 1990 and (iii) the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [7701]

Mr. Maclean: Table A gives information for England and Wales on the peak age of known offending, that is, offenders found guilty or cautioned for indictable offences per 100,000 in the general population in the age group.

Table B gives the readily available information for the Metropolitan police and City of London police force areas on the number of offenders found guilty or cautioned by sex and age.

Table A: Peak age for England and Wales of persons found guilty or cautioned for indictable offences per 100,000 in the general population in the age group; 1979, 1990 and 1995

England and Wales, Indictable offences

	Peak age		*Persons found guilty or cautioned per 100,000*	
Year	*Males*	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*
1979	15	14	7,404	1,639
1990	18	15	7,921	1,999
1995	18	15	8,376	2,115

Table B: Offenders found guilty or cautioned for indictable offences in the Metropolitan and City of London police force areas by age and sex, 1990 and 1995[1]

	Males		Females	
Age	*1990*	*1995*	*1990*	*1995*
10	176	64	30	17
11	291	203	60	61
12	607	516	135	182
13	1,112	830	270	351
14	1,737	1,641	442	580
15	2,475	2,538	509	669
16	2,938	2,908	550	541
17	3,640	3,763	596	557
18	4,357	4,464	667	614
19	4,321	4,109	639	559
20	3,960	3,870	613	543
21 to 24	13,813	12,619	2,394	2,005
25 to 30	13,887	16,636	2,648	3,034
31 and over	15,503	17,984	3,562	3,630
All ages	68,817	72,145	13,115	13,343

[1] Information for 1979 by detailed age group is not available centrally.

Juvenile Detainees

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what options are available to review the sentences of juveniles sentenced to detention during Her Majesty's pleasure if there is exceptional progress before the expiry of the tariff; how many cases have been reviewed in each year since 1983; and in how many cases in each year since 1983 early release has been authorised. [7927]

Miss Widdecombe: As the then Home Secretary announced on 30 November 1983, interim review procedures ensure that consideration can be given to any special circumstances or exceptional progress which might justify changing the Parole Board review date. Advancement of review dates under this policy, which applies equally to life sentenced prisoners and those detained during Her Majesty's pleasure or sentenced to custody for life, is exceptional. We have identified only four prisoners whose review dates have been advanced under this policy, none of whom was detained during Her Majesty's pleasure.

All life-sentenced prisoners, including those detained during Her Majesty's pleasure, are now given details of their tariff and may make representations about it at any time. All representations are carefully considered and a response is given.

Further statistical information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions in each year since 1983 he has *(a)* increased, *(b)* decreased and *(c)* upheld the judicial recommendation on tariff for juveniles sentenced to detention at Her Majesty's pleasure. [7942]

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not readily available for the period requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, since the judgment in the House of Lords in 1993 in Doody, which requires the disclosure of tariff information and the consideration of representations, 22 persons convicted of murder, and sentenced to be detained during Her Majesty's pleasure, have had a tariff set for the first time. Of these 22 tariffs: 20 are in line with the recommendation of the trial judge or of the Lord Chief Justice; and two are higher than the recommendations of both the trial judge and the Lord Chief Justice.

Similarly, 14 such persons whose tariffs had been set before the Doody judgment, have since had a fresh tariff set after submitting representations. Of these 14 fresh tariffs, three are lower than the first tariff. Two of these three lower tariffs are higher than, and one is in line with, the judicial recommendations. The remaining 11 new tariffs are the same as the original tariffs. In six of these 11 cases, the tariff has been set and has remained higher than the recommendations of both the trial judge and the Lord Chief Justice.

Court Cases (Departmental Costs)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list those cases in which writs have been served on his Department since May 1993 where the court found in favour of the plaintiff; and what were the costs incurred by his Department in defending those actions and any costs awarded against his Department in each case; [7962]

(2) if he will list those cases of judicial review since May 1993 in which the court ruled against his Department, the costs that were incurred by his Department and any costs that were awarded against his Department in each case. [7963]

Mr. Howard: The Home Office has been involved in several thousand judicial review applications since may 1993 and has been successful in more than 90 per cent. of them. The detailed information requested is not readily available.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8535]

Mr. Howard: Since 1 January 1996, 15 appointments have been made from names supplied by the public appointments unit. They were:

Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs: 1

Alcohol Education and Research Council: 1

Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel: 6 (reappointments)

Data Protection Tribunal: 4

Parole Board: 2

Police Information Technology Organisation: 1

Police Funding

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the appropriateness of the current police funding formula to meet the spending requirements of police authorities; what plans he has to review the spending needs formula; and if he will make a statement. [8339]

Mr. Maclean: The 1996–97 police funding formula is the best currently available means of assessing the relative needs of different police authorities. In 1997–98, as in

1996–97, we intend to consider with the allocation formula working group possible changes to the operation of the formula which may be suggested by the service, by police authorities and others.

Airgun Prosecutions

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been brought in each year since 1990 for possession of an airgun without a licence. [7177]

Miss Widdecombe: Only high powered air weapons require a police certificate issued under section 1(1) of the Firearms Act 1968. It is not possible, from the information held centrally, to identify prosecutions in respect of this type of firearm from others covered by the above mentioned section of the Act.

Firearms Homicides

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information the recent survey of firearms homicide obtained on *(a)* the type of firearm used and *(b)* the type of homicide; and if he will make a statement. [7125]

Miss Widdecombe: The following table gives the information requested:

Firearms homicide—circumstances of offence by type of firearm, England and Wales 1992–94

Circumstances of homicide	*Handguns*	*Shotguns*	*Other (and weapon type not known)*	*Total*
Organised crime, drugs related, contract killing etc	40	15	4	59
Domestic	15	41	4	60
Robbery or gain	8	5	2	15
Arguments, jealousy, revenge	6	10	–	16
Other (and not known)	10	14	22	46
Total	79	85	32	196

Rwanda (Arms Sales)

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the Isle of Man is subject to the UN embargo on the sale of arms of Rwanda; [7436]

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that the Isle of Man is subject to the UN embargo on arms sales to Rwanda; [7439]

(3) when he issued a Privy Council order ensuring the UN embargo on the sale of arms to Rwanda applies to *(a)* the Isle of Man and *(b)* other Crown dependencies; and on what dates such other were issued; [7437]

(4) what procedures are followed by his Department to ensure that Crown dependencies are subject to the same UN embargoes as the UK; and what plans he has to review them. [7438]

Mr. Sackville: The Isle of Man is subject to the United Nations embargo on the sale of arms to Rwanda. An Order in Council—SI 1994-1637—was made on 24 June 1994 which applied this embargo to all persons within the United Kingdom and to any person elsewhere who was a British citizen or a body incorporated under United Kingdom law. Most residents in the three crown dependencies are British citizens and are covered by this order, as are companies incorporated in any of the islands if they are operating from within the United Kingdom.

Orders in Council, which will have the effect of extending the embargo to companies incorporated in the islands and operating from outside the United Kingdom and to foreign nationals in the islands, will be made later this month. An inter-departmental committee has been set up to examine the procedures within Government in relation to the trafficking in arms, and to determine whether there has been a gap in controls and, if so, what action needs to be taken.

Criminal Records

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which statutory provisions govern the length of time criminal records are retained by the police; and what plans he has to define retention criteria on the basis of those outlined in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. [7550]

Mr. Maclean: There are no statutory provisions which govern the length of time criminal records are retained by the police. To ensure compliance with the data protection principles set out in the Data Protection Act 1984, the Association of Chief Police Officers—ACPO—issued a code of practice for police computer systems which includes guidelines on the removal of criminal record data when they are no longer required.

There are no plans to define the retention criteria on the basis of the rehabilitation periods set out in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

The police hold criminal record information for various purposes, including crime prevention and detection and in order to supply antecedent information to the courts. Conviction information retains its value for these purposes for much longer then the rehabilitation periods set out in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the items of personal data from the Phoenix system which would be disclosed *(a)* to data subjects via subject access and *(b)* to applicants on a criminal record certificate under the Data Protection Act 1984. [7551]

Mr. Maclean: Under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1984 individuals have the right, providing considerations of crime prevention do not arise, to see what information is held about them on Phoenix, the criminal records database on the police national computer. Subject to these considerations, data disclosed from Phoenix for subject access purposes would include name, address, sex, age, physical description, prosecution and conviction history, cautions, aliases, and modus operandi.

Criminal record certificates are not currently available. Under proposals being taken forward in the Police Bill, three types of certificate would be issued for employment

and related purposes. In relation to the Phoenix database, criminal conviction certificates would show details of convictions which are "unspent" under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974; criminal record certificates and enhanced certificates, which would be available only for occupations and offices which are exceptions to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, would show details of convictions and cautions.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of the population under the age of 35 years have a criminal record; and what proportion of these are male; [7548]

(2) how many individuals have criminal records which will never be spent under the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. [7547]

Mr. Maclean: Information available centrally on the percentage of the population with a criminal record relates to conviction for standard list offences only. Standard list offences include all indictable offences—including those triable either way—plus the more serious summary offences.

Results from criminal histories of a sample of offenders born in 1953 indicate that 21 per cent. of the population born in that year were convicted of at least one standard list offence before the age of 35. Of these, 82 per cent. were male. This analysis also indicates that 0.4 per cent. of the population born in 1953 had a conviction by age 35 that will never be spent.

Police Paperwork

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average number of forms which the police have to complete in order to prosecute a young offender. [7440]

Mr. Maclean: In the event of a guilty plea being entered, the police are required to complete an average of six forms in order to prosecute a young offender. In the event of a not guilty plea being entered, the police would be required to complete an average of 12 forms. Additional forms may be needed in complex cases.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average number of forms which the police must complete to prosecute and adult offender. [7442]

Mr. Maclean: In the event of a guilty plea being entered, the police are required to complete an average of five forms in order to prosecute an adult offender. In the event of a not guilty plea being entered, the police would be required to complete an average of ten forms. Additional forms may be needed in complex cases.

"On the Record"

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to paragraph 44 of his Department's paper, "On the Record," Cm 3308, if he will list the steps he proposes to take to prevent enforced subject access; what legislative proposals he has to deal with this matter; and if he will make a statement. [7552]

Mr. Maclean: The new criminal conviction certificates proposed in the White Paper, "On the Record", will provide employers and others with a legitimate means of obtaining information about criminal convictions which are unspent under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. There would be no justification for the practice of enforced subject access once these are introduced. Should the practice continue after their introduction we shall consider what action should be taken to discourage or prevent it.

Prosecutions

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prosecutions of adult offenders were started in each of the last five years; [7443]

(2) how many prosecutions of young offenders were started in each of the last five years. [7441]

Mr. Maclean: The complexities of the criminal justice system and the constraints on resources in collating and processing data necessarily limit the amount of information collected routinely, and so only the final outcome of proceedings at magistrates' courts is collected centrally.

Information on the number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts by age group is published in the Command Paper, "Criminal Statistics England and Wales 1995"—latest available. Table 6.1 refers.

Copies of the publication are available in the Library.

Surrendered Guns

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what sums in compensation have been paid to owners of weapons voluntarily surrendered since the Hungerford killings under specific agreements made with the police; and what Government payments are outstanding in respect of claims for compensation. [7742]

Miss Widdecombe: There have been two Government schemes since 1987 where people have received payments in exchange for surrendering weapons which became prohibited under the firearms legislation. A total of £620,000 was paid in relation to claims following the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988. A total of £42,000 was paid in relation to claims following the Firearms (Amendment) Regulations 1992. The Department has considered all claims made under these schemes and advised claimants of the outcome. Offers have been made to all claimants entitled to receive compensation.

Imprisonment Terms

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals committed offences which have carried a term of imprisonment of *(a)* up to six months, *(b)* between six months and 12 months, *(c)* between 12 months and 18 months, *(d)* between 18 months and 24 months and *(e)* between 24 months and 29 months in the last year for which figures are available; and for *(a)* to *(e)* if he will list the relevant rehabilitation period for each category. [7549]

Mr. Maclean: Court proceedings data as requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The rehabilitation periods applicable to a conviction are subject to provisions as set out in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

Firearms

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make compensation available to commercial establishments suffering loss of income as a result of new firearms legislation; and if he will make a statement. [7761]

Miss Widdecombe: We do not propose to make payments in relation to business losses. There is a clear distinction between compensation for property made unlawful as a result of Government legislation, where Government are obliged to compensate owners of that property, and compensation of business losses which result from Government legislation where there is no precedent for compensation being paid.

Miss Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what compensation Her Majesty's Government will pay for accessories for firearms newly banned by regulation; and if he will make a statement. [7803]

Miss Widdecombe: Payments will be made in respect of ancillary equipment which is designed or adapted for use in connection with the firearms which the Bill seeks to ban, and which has no practicable use in connection with any non-prohibited weapons. Payments will be made only where the claimant lawfully held, or was contracted to acquire, the equipment on 16 October.

Payments will be at market value immediately prior to 16 October. We shall be assessing how to set market value in discussion with the British Shooting Sports Council.

Miss Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make additional funding available to the police in 1997 to curb ownership of illegally held firearms; and if he will make a statement. [7783]

Miss Widdecombe: Although my right hon. and learned Friend has made no specific provision for this purpose, the spending power of police authorities will increase by 3.7 per cent. or £247 million in 1997–98. Tackling illegally-held firearms remains a high priority of the Government and the police.

European Year Against Racism

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what resources he will be making available to support initiatives relating to the declaration of 1997 as the European Year Against Racism. [7799]

Mr. Kirkhope: The Home Office, in co-operation with the Commission for Racial Equality, is committing resources to co-ordination and administration of the European Year Against Racism within the United Kingdom. In common with other Government Departments, it will be involved in a number of initiatives relating to the European year in its own areas of responsibility. Details will be announced at the appropriate time. The success of this initiative will depend on the continuing commitment of organisations across the country to play a full part in action to improve race relations and equality of opportunity.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum have been refused on safe third country grounds since *(a)* 1 January and *(b)* 1 September. [7810]

Mr. Kirkhope: A total of 1,390 principal applicants were refused asylum on safe third country grounds between 1 January and 30 November 1996; of these 530 were refused in the months of September, October and November.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many asylum seekers, having been refused asylum on safe third country grounds, have been removed or have made a voluntary departure from the United Kingdom in each month since 1 January; [7809]

(2) how many asylum seekers, having been refused asylum on safe third country grounds, were removed or made a voluntary departure from the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1995. [7813]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is given in the table. The information for 1996 is provisional.

Number of removals and voluntary departures of those refused asylum on safe third country grounds, 1994–95, January to October 1996

Year	*Number of removals/voluntary departures (safe third country cases)*
1994	403
1995	419
1996[1]	
January	34
February	33
March	21
April	33
May	31
June	25
July	28
August	30
September	58
October	66
1996, Year to date	359

[1] Provisional figures.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appeals against a refusal of asylum are currently being processed by his Department; and how many appeals against a refusal of asylum, having been processed by his Department and dispatched to the immigration appellate authority, are awaiting determination by the immigration appellate authority. [7811]

Mr. Kirkhope: As at 31 October, there were 1,230 asylum appeals awaiting validation and preparation by the Asylum Directorate and 19,600 appeals awaiting a hearing by the Immigration Appellate Authority.

Racial Discrimination

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the 1996 report on racial discrimination in the criminal justice system. [7778]

Mr. Maclean: The booklet, "Race and Criminal Justice System" was published by my right hon. and learned Friend in March this year. We intend to publish next year information on the results of the extension of ethnic monitoring of police activity.

Released Prisoners (Accommodation)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures are in place to monitor the type of accommodation to which prisoners are released; and what plans he has to publish national statistics on the proportion of prisoners released to (i) temporary accommodation, (ii) permanent accommodation and (iii) no fixed abode. [6653]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. George Howarth, dated 10 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General, to reply to your recent Question about what procedures are in place to monitor the type of accommodation to which prisoners are released and what plans there are to publish national statistics on the proportion of prisoners released to different types of accommodation.

These statistics are not collected centrally, and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. There are therefore no plans to publish such information.

Research has highlighted three key factors in helping ex-prisoners retain their homes: the quality of family relationships, the availability of housing benefit, and their financial status, which is linked to employment, training and educational opportunities. A range of support is therefore provided to prisoners to assist them in obtaining suitable accommodation on release. This includes:

- provision of housing and employment advice through officers specially trained by the NACRO Prison Link Unit;
- advice on benefit entitlements;
- assistance in maintaining family ties, for example through visits, correspondence and access to cardphones;
- maximising opportunities for employment, training and education;
- release on temporary licence for suitable prisoners for work, training and education, and to assist with resettlement towards the end of their sentences.
- inmate development and pre-release training, which aims to teach prisoners skills to cope with major resettlement problems;
- sentence planning, which assists the prisoner in planning for release;
- provision of a Directory of Help Agencies, which provides information on agencies providing assistance to ex-offenders locally.

Further assistance is available from the Probation Service to ex-prisoners on statutory supervision following release.

Detention Costs

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total amount of detention costs reclaimed from carrying companies in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996 to date. [7787]

Mr. Kirkhope: In the financial year 1995–96, the Home Office recovered some £372,000 in detention costs from carrying companies. In the current financial year to 30 November, the amount so far received is £417,000.

Anti-stalking Laws

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which other countries' anti-stalking laws his Department has assessed in drawing up anti-stalking legislation; and if he will make a statement. [7794]

Mr. Maclean: My officials examined the approaches to stalking adopted in the United States of America, Canada and Australia. These generally only criminalise acts which are already offences in the United Kingdom, and we therefore concluded that the United Kingdom would have to develop a new approach. Our proposals are contained in the Protection from Harassment Bill, introduced on 5 December.

Television Licences

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the number of children taken into care over the last five years following the imprisonment of a parent for television licence fine default. [7781]

Mr. Maclean: Information to make the relevant assessment is not available centrally.

Harassment

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been convicted of causing intentional harassment, alarm or distress under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. [7796]

Mr. Maclean: In 1995, 40 persons were convicted for the offence of "causing intentional harassment, alarm of distress" under section 154 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Detainees

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases of a person detained under Immigration Act powers were reviewed by the director of the immigration service in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996 to date. [7807]

Mr. Kirkhope: Taking their respective caseloads together, the two directors of the Immigration Service reviewed detention in about 450 cases in 1995 and about 700 cases to date in 1996.

Venezuelan Prisoners

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Venezuelan citizens are being detained in prisons in the United Kingdom. [7307]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 10 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many Venezuelan citizens are being detained in prisons in the United Kingdom.

On 31 October 1996 (the latest date for which figures are available) there were 13 Venezuelan nationals in custody in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales. Information on prisoners in Scotland and in Northern Ireland is available from the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of cases currently awaiting a hearing before the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board; how many cases have been cleared each quarter for each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [7944]

Mr. Maclean: The number of cases currently awaiting hearing before the board is some 26,000. The number of such cases cleared in the period April 1993 to March 1996 is as follows:

Quarter	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96
April–June	2,388	3,241	2,334
July–September	2,685	2,751	2,274
October–December	2,560	3,033	2,796
January–March	3,315	2,254	2,831
Total	10,948	11,279	10,235

Early this year the membership of the board was increased from 44 to 49 to assist in tackling the backlog arising from the 1990 common law damages based scheme. The board is aiming to clear 12,000 appeals cases in 1996–97 and more in 1997–98. On 1 April 1996, a new tariff-based scheme was introduced with a separate appeals panel established to provide a wholly independent system for appeals and to deal with them more speedily.

Offences (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners convicted for offences which can be regarded as related to the situation in Northern Ireland are currently held in prisons in Great Britain; [6744]

(2) how many prisoners convicted for offences which can be regarded as related to the situation in Northern Ireland have been transferred from Great Britain to *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* the Republic of Ireland, since 9 February. [6745]

Miss Widdecombe: Nineteen prisoners convicted of terrorist-related offences in connection with the situation in Northern Ireland are currently held in prisons in England and Wales. A further nine prisoners have been temporarily transferred to prisons in Northern Ireland. Four prisoners are currently held in Scotland.

Since 9 February 1996, one prisoner has been temporarily transferred to a prison in Northern Ireland and five prisoners have been repatriated to prisons in the Republic of Ireland from prisons in England and Wales. One prisoner has been temporarily transferred from Scotland to Northern Ireland.

Prisons (Drugs)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the accuracy of drug tests being carried out in the Prison Service. [6250]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 10 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about representations received concerning the accuracy of drug tests carried out by the Prison Service.

Mandatory drug testing is a new procedure, and as such has been subject to several representations, including some about the accuracy of the drug tests carried out. Individual prisoners may also have raised concerns through the requests/complaints procedure, but these are not recorded centrally.

Prisoners have a right to challenge the results of a test specifically by requesting an independent analysis of a portion of the sample they provided which is retained for this purpose. Release of this sample is authorised at Prison Service Headquarters. To date 15 requests have been received from solicitors acting on behalf of prisoners in challenging the result of a particular test. These requests include supply of the sample itself, for the purposes of independent analysis, or for the documentation which supports the initial test result.

In addition, on 7 May the Head of Healthcare at HMP Wealstun noted that there were conflicting results on the same inmate on occasions when he had done a voluntary drug test, analysed at Harrogate District Hospital within a day or so of the Mandatory Drug Test. He was asked to furnish the data which led to his concerns so that investigation could take place and remedial action taken as necessary. These details have not been furnished and so the specific cases have not been followed up.

There always will be differences in the results of tests used by medical officers for therapeutic purposes and those produced through the Mandatory Drug Testing programme since the purposes are different. The latter operates to agreed threshold levels, and prisoners are only found to have tested positive once this threshold is exceeded. This is to ensure that when a charge is laid on the basis of a positive confirmation test result it is beyond reasonable doubt that the prisoner took the drug in question. Some changes have been made to the method of testing for opiates since July which now ensure that opiate use is more likely to be picked up from a Mandatory Drug Test.

On 15 July the Chairman of the Board of Visitors at Downview prison raised concerns about three prisoners who had screened positive for opiates and three who had screened positive for benzodiazepines in early June. All had been found negative through confirmation testing. The opiate results were attributed to the absence of an hydrolysis process from confirmation testing, which resulted in a number of samples that correctly screened positive for opiates confirmation testing negative. Hydrolysis was introduced on 2 July.

In two of the cases involving benzodiazepines, the prisoners had been prescribed a combination of medications which cross-reacted with the reagent used in the screening test. Confirmation testing uses a different technology which avoids such cross-reactions. In the third case it is thought that the sample may have been positive for an uncommon type of benzodiazepine which is not recognised in confirmation testing. The Prison Service, in conjunction with the Laboratory of the Government Chemist, is considering ways of extending the range of drugs detected by confirmation testing.

On 5 August the Kent Area Manager raised concerns about six samples from Blantyre House prison which had screened positive for cannabis, but were all found to be negative on confirmation. It was discovered that for a period of 1½ hours on 5 July the screen testing machine had been mis-calibrated, producing 84 false positive results. all prisons affected were notified. The Laboratory of the Government Chemist has since introduced more rigorous quality control procedures, ensuring that results do not leave the laboratory until all checks have been made.

Replica and Imitation Firearms

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offences were carried out in each year using *(a)* replica firearms which were capable of being modified to fire ammunition and *(b)* imitation firearms incapable of being so modified. [7045]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 2 December 1996]:* The available information relates to the number of offences where imitation firearms of all types were used. The figure includes replicas, but further details are not collected centrally.

Such figures are published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales". Copies of these publications are in the Library.

In England and Wales in 1995, 378 notifiable offences were recorded by the police in which imitation firearms were reported to have been used.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what considerations led him to place controls on only those replica firearms which can be modified to fire ammunition. [7047]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 2 December 1996]:* The Firearms Act 1982 applies licensing controls to imitation firearms which are so constructed or adapted as to be readily convertible into a functioning firearm. Other toy and imitation firearms pose no danger in themselves. The use of imitation firearms of any kind in furtherance of crime carries the same penalty as the use of a real firearm: life imprisonment.

"Misspent Youth, Young People and Crime"

Mr. Alex Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Audit Commission report "Misspent Youth, Young People and Crime". [7507]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* The Government welcome the Audit Commission's recommendations on a strategy for early intervention to deal with children and young people at risk of offending. The Government will be proposing this approach in a Green Paper to be published shortly. The Government do not agree with the proposition that it is right to caution repeat offenders; they should be brought before the courts to face the consequences of their crimes.

Young Offenders Institutions

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 15 and 16-year-olds have been detained in young offenders institutions in each year since 1992. [7153]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 3 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. John Hutton, dated 10 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, how many 15 and 16 year olds have been detained in young offenders institutions in each year since 1992.

The available information is for the population of 15 and 16 year olds held after sentence of detention in a young offender institution on 30 June each year. This is published in successive volumes of "Prison statistics, England and Wales" (table 3.2 of the 1995 edition, Cm 3355), copies of which are available from the library.

Provisional information for 30 June 1996 is given in the attached table.

Population of 15 and 16 year olds in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on 30 June 1996[1] sentenced to detention in a YOI

Sex and age	*Detention in a young offender institution*
Males	
Aged 15	129
Aged 16	306
Females	
Aged 15	7
Aged 16	16

[1] Provisional figures.

Butane Gas Sales (Prosecutions)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been brought in each of the last five years for sales of butane gas to minors; and if he will provide a regional breakdown where available. [7751]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* Information collected centrally under the Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act 1985 does not identify the substance involved.

Drug Dealers

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, (1) pursuant to his answer of 2 December, *Official Report*, columns *471–72*, if he will set out the methodology which leads to the conclusion that around 120 of those convicted of class A offences in 1994 had two or more previous offences; [7918]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 2 December, *Official Report*, columns *471–72*, if he will list the offences regarded as similar offences to class A drug trafficking offences. [7919]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* The methodology involved creating a sample of third-time drug traffickers from the "Offenders Index", which contains criminal histories from 1963, and using a separate dataset on offenders dealt with for drug offences to establish which offences involved class A drugs where this was not known on the "Offenders Index". The offences included were those relating to the unlawful importation or exportation of a controlled drug, production or being concerned in production of a

controlled drug, supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug and having possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply.

The study did not provide estimates of the number of offenders convicted of a first or second offence, or a monthly breakdown. Of those convicted of a third or subsequent offence, 90 per cent. received a custodial sentence and the average sentence length was just over four years. The period of the study was October to December 1994.

Speed Cameras

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what sums were paid in fines as a result of convictions on the basis of evidence obtained from speed cameras in *(a)* Dorset and *(b)* England in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and what is his estimate of the level of fines which will be imposed in each of these areas in the current financial year. [7752]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* The information requested is not available.

The majority of offences of speeding detected by automatic cameras are dealt with by fixed penalty notice, the current charge being £40. The number of such offences for Dorset and England are contained in the table.

Information is not available to distinguish whether or not speeding offences dealt with by fines were detected by automatic cameras, but the average fine for all speeding offences in England and Wales is also shown, along with the number of camera detected offences dealt with by court proceedings.

No estimates are made of future fine levels likely to be imposed.

Speeding offences by how detected and how dealt with and average fines

	Camera detected offences dealt with by fixed penalty		*Camera detected offences dealt with by court proceedings*		*Average fine for speeding (all such offences)*
	Dorset	*England*	*Dorset*	*England*	*England and wales*
1993	1,129	25,767	[1]—	6,374	127
1994	5,046	95,510	[1]—	20,573	113
1995	5,951	168,536	125	36,274	107

[1] Information not available for Dorset for 1993 and 1994. However, in those years respectively, 12 and 63 offences of all kinds detected by cameras were reported for summons.

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from police forces seeking additional resources for the provision of speed cameras. [7753]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* In the last two years, representations on this issue have been received from some five forces and/or their police authorities.

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish a review into the merits of returning the sums paid in fines as a result of convictions on the basis of evidence from speed cameras to *(a)* the relevant police authority and *(b)* the relevant local authority. [7754]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* No. Fine income from the enforcement of speeding offences by cameras, like all other fine income from criminal offences, goes to the Consolidated Fund at the Treasury. It is not the Government's general policy to earmark that income to a particular area of expenditure.

HEALTH

Health Authority Funding

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities no longer fund (i) obstructive sleep apnoea referrals and (ii) sex change assessments and operations. [7278]

Mr. Malone: Information about health authority purchasing decisions is not held centrally. Each case should be decided on its clinical merits.

Prostate Cancer

Sir Julian Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will allocate more funds to research into, and finding a cure for, prostate cancer; [7463]

(2) if he will encourage general practitioners to take a blood test for prostate cancer as part of routine examinations for men over 40 years. [7460]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health's standing group on health technology has identified carcinoma of the prostate as one of the priority areas for health technology assessment. Two systematic reviews of the diagnosis, management and screening of early localised prostate cancer, commissioned by the Department, have recently been completed. The reports found no justification for the routine use of the prostate specific antigen blood test by general practitioners. There is at present no evidence that the number of prostate cancer deaths could be reduced by screening asymptomatic men. Screening may also lead to unnecessary investigations and treatment, with the risk of inducing anxiety and adverse physical side effects.

The Department's national screening committee will consider screening for prostate cancer as part of its programme of reviews of a wide range of screening programmes in the national health service. Other research projects are under way. The national screening committee will consider any new scientific evidence as it becomes available.

Douglas Byelong

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names of the mental health tribunal and clinical team who assessed Douglas Byelong as fit to live in the community; and what assessment he has made of the current system for assessing whether patients detained on mental and criminal grounds should be released. [7814]

Mr. Burns: It is a statutory requirement that the names of persons concerned in tribunal proceedings should not be made public. The mental health review tribunals are independent judicial bodies and their procedures are defined in the mental health review tribunal rules made by the Lord Chancellor. Copies of the rules are available in the Library. The Department of Health has recently commissioned a research study into the decision making process of the tribunals.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names of past and present members of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority and the Genetics Commission who have been, or are, members of the British Eugenics Society or the Galton Institute. [7896]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been allocated to support research into the causes and treatment of MS in each year since 1990. [7804]

Mr. Malone: Funding specifically on multiple sclerosis from the Department of Health and the Medical Research Council since 1990 appears in the table.

1989–90: £182,000

1990–91: £181,000

1991–92: £80,000

1992–93: £64,000

1993–94: £154,000

1994–95: £207,000

1995–96: £216,000.

Note:

The MRC also undertakes work under the broader headings of autoimmune disorders and diseases of the central nervous system (£6,280,000 in 1995–96), and neurodegenerative diseases, all of which underpin research into MS.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the amount allocated by each health authority in England to *(a)* beta-interferon and *(b)* other drugs used in the treatment of people with MS for the most recent available year; and what sums were spent. [7805]

Mr. Malone: Information is not collected centrally on the amounts allocated for beta-interferon or other individual drugs by individual health authorities.

I refer the hon. Member to my response to the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) on 4 November, column *404* for the latest information on spending on beta-interferon drugs. It is not possible to identify the amount spent on other drugs used in the treatment of patients with multiple sclerosis.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of multi-drug-resistant TB have been diagnosed in each of the last five years. [7967]

Mr. Horam: In 1992, the Public Health Laboratory Service carried out a review of the occurrence of drug resistance in cases of tuberculosis in England and Wales between 1982 and 1991. The review was published in 1993. In 1993, an enhanced surveillance system—the United Kingdom mycobacterial resistance network, MYCOBNET—was established by the PHLS communicable disease surveillance centre to monitor drug resistance in isolates of mycobacterium tuberculosis. Data from the review and the MYCOBNET system are as listed. Direct comparison between the numbers of multi-drug resistant isolates identified during the two periods is not possible because of the different methods used to obtain the information. Multi-drug resistant cases account for around 1 per cent. of notified cases of tuberculosis.

Initial isolates of multi-drug resistant[1] Mycobacterium tuberculosis in England and Wales, 1990–1995

Year	*Number of multi-drug resistant isolates*
1990	8
1991	14

[2] Data from PHLS review published in 1993.

[1] Resistant to isoniazid and rifiampicin with or without resistance to other drugs.

Data from MYCOBNET system:

Year	*Number of multi-drug resistant isolates*
1993	18
1994	42
1995	56

Antibiotics

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the extent of over-prescribing of antibiotics. [8040]

Mr. Malone: No assessment has been made. Health authority medical and pharmaceutical advisers routinely monitor all prescribing by general practitioners, including antibiotic prescribing, to ensure drugs are used appropriately. Local microbiologists and physicians are responsible for the control of infectious diseases, and advise doctors on local bacterial resistance, and advising on antibiotic use and choice. However, it is up to individual clinicians to provide the most effective treatment for the individual patient.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8544]

Mr. Horam: The public appointments unit provides names of suitably qualified candidates for consideration for a wide range of appointments. Information on the source of names of individual appointees to public bodies could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

BSE and CJD

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, columns *720–21*, if he will list the unqualified evidence linking BSE and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease assessed by his Department *(a)* before and *(b)* since 25 March; and if he will make a statement. [8341]

Mr. Horam: There is no unqualified evidence linking bovine spongiform encephalopathy and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee's advice has been drawn up on the basis of the balance of probabilities considering all the various evidence available. Its view is that a connection between exposure to BSE and new variant CJD is likely but not conclusively established.

Section 64 Grants

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the grants which have been made available under section 64 in 1996 by organisation and amount of grant. [6672]

Mr. Burns *[holding answer 28 November 1996]:* The information requested has been placed in the Library. Grants of the amounts shown to voluntary organisations have been approved for payment during the current financial year.

Care Home Residents

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in United Kingdom care homes have preserved rights to income support; what proportion of these people are charged more than they receive from income support; in what circumstances individuals who cannot meet these extra charges are evicted from care homes; and if he will make a statement. [6124]

Mr. Roger Evans: I have been asked to reply.

The latest available information for the United Kingdom as a whole is for May 1994. It is estimated that in May 1994 there were 228,000 cases in the United Kingdom with preserved rights to income support. Of these 58,000, 25 per cent., had charges exceeding the total income support received.

For a person with preserved rights to the higher levels of income support, the arrangements for the provision of care and the actual level of charges are a matter between the resident and proprietor of the residential care or nursing home. In exceptional circumstances the local authority may be able to arrange alternative accommodation if a person is being evicted.

Notes:

1. Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Sample size 5 per cent.
3. Numbers refer to benefit units which may be a single person or a couple.

Sources:

1. Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry Residential Care and Nursing Home Report May 1994.
2. Income Support Statistics (Northern Ireland) Annual Enquiry May 1994.

SCOTLAND

Self-governing Schools

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department has spent to date on promoting the development of self-governing status for local authority schools; and what action it has taken to do this. [7164]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: In line with usual practice for legislation, the Scottish Office education and industry department has published factual advice about the Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Act 1989 which explains all matters relating to self-governing schools and the procedures set out in that Act. These publications are for the benefit of school boards, parents, teachers and others wishing to be fully informed about these matters. The costs are met from general departmental provision and are not separately identifiable. In addition the Department organised a national conference in September 1993 which was attended by over 200 delegates representing schools and other bodies throughout Scotland.

In October 1996, following competitive tender, my right hon. Friend appointed Mr. Ian Dutton, a former Director of Education of Borders regional council, as a consultant on self-governing matters. His role is to provide information and support to existing self-governing schools and to school boards, parents and others wishing to consider the option of their school becoming self-governing, or simply wishing to know more about the practical aspects of this policy.

Water Authorities

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the West of Scotland water authority's right of appeal against the refusal of planning permission by Kyle and district council for a new sewage treatment works at Greenan lapses. [7423]

Mr. Kynoch: The West of Scotland water authority has already exercised its right to appeal against the refusal of planning permission. The case has been sited until 25 February to allow both parties to seek to reach a compromise over planning permission. If no agreement seems in prospect, and the appeal is not withdrawn, the matter will go to a public local inquiry and determination by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the West of Scotland water authority to make a final decision on the Ayr sewerage scheme. [7425]

Mr. Kynoch: The West of Scotland water authority will meet on Friday 13 December when consideration will be given to the outcome of a detailed review of the options for treating the sewage collected from Ayr.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many complaints have been lodged to date with the Scottish water and sewerage customers council. [7429]

Mr. Kynoch: The Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers Council had received 171 complaints to Monday 2 December 1996.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent to date on the establishment and operating costs of the Scottish water and sewerage customers council; and how much will be spent on the council's operation during the current financial year. [7428]

Mr. Kynoch: During the period up to 31 March 1996 the establishment and operating costs were £239,000. In the present financial year 1996–97, the council has a budget of £1.2 million which is wholly funded by a levy on the water and sewerage authorities.

Beaches

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each year since 1991 those beaches which complied with the EU bathing water directive standard guide for *(a)* total and faecal coliforms, *(b)* faecal streptococci and *(c)* coliforms and faecal streptococci combined. [7446]

Mr. Kynoch: The beaches which, since 1991, have complied with the EU bathing water directive standard guide for *(a)* total and faecal coliforms, *(b)* faecal streptococci and *(c)* coliforms and faecal streptococci is set out in the table:

Total and faecal coliforms	*Faecal streptococci*	*Coliforms and faecal streptococci combined*
1991 Cullen, Gullane *1992* Cullen, St. Andrews West Sands, Dunbar Belhaven, Pease Bay	No testing was made for (b) or (c) until 1993	
1993 St. Andrews West Sands, Gullane, Dunbar Belhaven	Aberdour Silversands, Gullane, Dunbar Belhaven	Gullane, Dunbar Belhaven
1994 Cullen, Montrose, St. Andrews West Sands, Aberdour Silversands, Dunbar Belhaven, Pease Bay	Nairn, Cullen, Montrose, Arbroath, Carnoustie, St. Andrews West Sands, Aberdour Silversands, Yellowcraigs, Dunbar Belhaven, Pease Bay	Cullen, Montrose, St. Andrews West Sands, Aberdour Silversands, Dunbar Belhaven, Pease Bay
1995 Cullen, St. Andrews West Sands, Aberdour Silversands, Gullane, Dunbar Belhaven	Nairn, Cullen, Fraserburgh, Arbroath, St. Andrews West Sands, Aberdour Silversands, Gullane, Pease Bay	Cullen, St. Andrews West Sands, Aberdour Silversands, Gullane
1996 Aberdeen, St. Andrews West Sands, Aberdour Silversands, Gullane, Dunbar Belhaven, Pease Bay	Fraserburgh, Aberdeen, Montrose, St. Andrews West Sands, Gullane, Dunbar Belhaven, Pease Bay	Aberdeen, St. Andrews West Sands, Gullane, Dunbar Belhaven, Pease Bay

Sugar Refinery Closure

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what discussions he has had with representatives of Tate and Lyle plc about the cost of refined sugar delivered to industrial customers in Scotland following the announced closure of its cane sugar refinery in Greenock; and if he will make a statement; [7160]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with representatives of Tate anent Lyle plc about its proposals relating to the construction and staffing of a depot and warehouse in the Glasgow area; and if he will make a statement. [7161]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 4 December 1996]:* My right hon. Friend has had no discussions with the company about these matters. Just as its arrangements for distributing its products are best left to a company, the prices it charges its customers is a matter for negotiation, again best left to supplier and customer.

Legal Aid

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he has taken in the last three years in respect of individuals submitting applications for legal aid which give false or misleading information abcut their personal circumstances. [7953]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This is a matter for the Scottish Legal Aid Board, and I have no power to intervene. The board may employ a range of measures in these circumstances, including issuing a warning letter, terminating the grant of legal aid, recovering legal aid granted on the basis of false information, or in the worst case, reporting the applicant to the police or the procurator fiscal.

Housing (Falkirk)

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to the letter of 28 November from the Minister with responsibility for education, housing and fisheries to the hon. Member for Falkirk, West, if he will make a statement on *(a)* the independent valuation of the Scottish Homes housing stock in each housing estate in the Falkirk council area and *(b)* the funding and staffing assistance which the Paragon Housing Association receives from Scottish Homes. [8266]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* In line with guidance given by the Secretary of State, Scottish Homes obtains an independent valuation of the houses in any ballot area where it proposes to transfer stock to an alternative landlord. This valuation is subsequently used as a benchmark against which final decisions are taken. This arrangement is consistent with a recommendation made by the National Audit Office.

I understand that, in accordance with its procedures for providing seedcorn funding and staffing assistance to new and emerging housing associations, Scottish Homes has provided Paragon housing association with £39,000 and the assistance of one member of staff seconded to the association for two days a week.

DEFENCE

Air Training Corp

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of the Air Training Corp and the Army Cadet Force. [8087]

Mr. Soames: The role of the Air Training Corps, as stated in the objects of the corps, is:

(a) to promote and encourage among young people a practical interest in aviation and the Royal Air Force;

(b) to provide training which will be useful both in the services and in civil life;

(c) to foster the spirit of adventure and to develop the qualities of leadership and good citizenship.

The role of the Army Cadet Force, as stated in its charter, is to inspire young people to achieve success in life with a spirit of service to the Queen, their country and their local community, and to develop in them the qualities of a good citizen. This aim is achieved by:

(a) providing progressive cadet training, often of a challenging and exciting nature, to foster confidence, self reliance, initiative, loyalty, and a sense of service to others;

(b) encouraging the development of personal powers of practical leadership and the ability to work successfully as a member of a team;

(c) stimulating an interest in the Army, its achievements, skills and values;

(d) advising and preparing those considering a career in the services or with the reserve forces.

Radiation Testing

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what records his Department maintains in respect of when tests of radioactive material on humans began at the atomic research establishments at *(a)* Harwell and *(b)* Aldermaston. [8288]

Mr. Soames: Other than to emphasise that Harwell is not a MoD establishment, I have nothing to add to the response I gave to the hon Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) on 2 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *534*.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what monitoring *(a)* has taken place and *(b)* there is currently of the health of people who were the subject of tests on the effects of radioactive material. [8295]

Mr. Soames: I have nothing to add to the response I gave to the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) on 2 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *534–35*).

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the basis for the letter dated 9 February from the manager, administration and public relations at Aldermaston in respect of radiation experiments on human subjects at Aldermaston. [8289]

Mr. Soames: I assume the hon. Member is referring to a letter dated 9 February, 1994, which was sent by the manager administration and public relations, AWE Aldermaston, in response to an inquiry from Dr. A. Victorian about human radiation experiments at AWE. It was considered by my Department at the time that his inquiry had been prompted by publicity about unethical experiments conducted by the US authorities many years ago; hence the terms of the reply. Details of Aldermaston's involvement in a number of entirely ethical experiments carried out in the 1980s were forwarded to Dr. Victorian in December last year in response to his subsequent inquiries. The suggestion of denials does not therefore arise.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements are in place for compensating people subjected to experimental exposure to radioactive material if they subsequently develop health problems associated with such exposure. [8290]

Mr. Soames: My Department will pay compensation whenever it is properly due. We are not aware of any compensation claim in which a claimant could show, either to my Department or in a court of law, that he has an injury or illness which was, more likely than not, caused by experimental exposure to radiation.

Mid-Air Collisions

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment he has made of the probability of a mid-air collision involving RAF fast jets over United Kingdom air space. [8212]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to his previous questions on this subject, on 9 January, *Official Report*, column *96* and 17 January 1996, *Official Report*, column *581*. The study referred to in these answers is still under way and now expected to be completed in early 1997.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the references in the United Kingdom radioactive waste inventory to the option of storing complete submarine reactor compartments ashore; and what review Her Majesty's Government are making of the policy of dismantling such reactor plant for storage at the proposed Nirex repository. [7464]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Government consider that it is appropriate for decommissioned nuclear-powered submarines to be stored safely afloat at the location where they are decommissioned, pending final disposal. This policy is kept under review to take account of technical or other developments. Our current assessment is that interim storage afloat provides a safe and cost effective route to final disposal.

As is stated in the UK NIREX 1994 radioactive waste inventory other alternatives to interim storage afloat, including the removal of the rector compartment in one piece and its storage on land, are kept under review.

The perceived final disposal route for the intermediate level waste remaining in the reactor compartments of decommissioned submarines is the deep repository being developed by NIREX, early next century.

West Indies Guardship

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of the West Indies Guardship in inhibiting the flow of drugs from South America. [7951]

Mr. Soames: In addition to her other duties, the West Indies Guardship—WIGS—together with her Royal Fleet Auxiliary tanker, makes a very considerable and valuable contribution to the international fight against drug trafficking in the Caribbean, which is one of the major trafficking routes for drugs from South America. WIGS has, in recent years, been directly involved in the interception of substantial amounts of illegal drugs in the region.

Ministry of Defence Police

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to receive the latest annual report of the chief constable of the Ministry of Defence police. [7973]

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State expects to receive the chief constable's annual report for financial year 1995–96 within the next two weeks. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

Volunteers (Compensation)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his policy towards compensation claims made by volunteers in experiments conducted by agencies for which he is responsible. [8615]

Mr. Soames: My Department will pay compensation whenever it is properly due. We are not aware of any compensation claim in which a claimant could show, either to my Department or in a court of law, that he has an injury or illness which was, more likely than not, caused by experiments conducted by agencies or establishments for which my Department is responsible.

Joint Strike Fighter

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution he has made to the costs of the joint strike fighter project of the United States and in which year those costs were incurred; what were the financial terms of the contribution; and under what circumstances the contribution can be reclaimed. [8511]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Ministry of Defence has contributed $13,022,539 to the United States joint strike fighter programme. These costs were incurred this year. We have agreed to contribute a total of $200 million to the programme between 1996 and 2000. This contribution represents 10 per cent. of the cost of work related to the short take-off, vertical landing variant of the aircraft during the concept demonstration phase of the programme. We expect British companies to gain work of at least equivalent value in this phase of the programme. The terms of the United Kingdom's contribution are set down in a memorandum of understanding with the United States Department of Defence which was signed in December 1995, a copy of which was placed in the Library of the House. We do not currently envisage any circumstances under which the United Kingdom's contribution would be reclaimed although continuation of work on the programme is subject to evidence of satisfactory progress.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8543]

Mr. Arbuthnot: In the last year, amongst the Department's public bodies as listed in "Public Bodies", two individuals originally identified by the public appointments unit were reappointed to their positions on the Advisory Committee on Conscientious Objectors.

Deveonport Dockyard

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement on the privatisation of Devonport dockyard. [8454]

Mr. Arbuthnot: It is hoped to make a further announcement on the proposed privatisation of Devonport royal dockyard within the next few weeks.

Directorate General Ships

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on defence agency status for the Navy's DG Ships organisation. [8703]

Mr. Soames: The Directorate General Ships was formed within the naval support command in October 1995 to gather together different elements of the Royal Navy's engineering and material support functions. The organisation is responsible for directing the in-service support of surface ships and submarines and their equipments; for ensuring that proper consideration is given to support issues and marine engineering design requirements in the procurement of new naval platforms; and for the ownership and management of the naval stores inventory except for fuel and food. It contributes to the operational capability of the Royal Navy, together with other areas of the naval support command, to ensure the overall material availability, reliability and maintainability of front line military equipment. The main internal customer is the Commander-in-Chief Fleet, although the organisation is also closely engaged with the procurement executive in minimising the support costs of new vessels and equipments.

Internal review since its formation has shown that the services of the organisation will be most effectively delivered in the future by establishing it as a defence agency. It is therefore being launched on Wednesday 11 December as the Ships Support Agency. As a defence agency it remains part of the Department, but the chief executive has been delegated the necessary powers to discharge his responsibilities.

The Ships Support Agency comprises a headquarters at Foxhill, Bath, and currently occupies six other main sites—at Copenacre, Devonport, Eaglescliffe, Portsmouth, Rosyth and Weymouth. It employs some 2,800 staff, of whom 2,450 are civil servants, with the balance being military. Between 1996 and 2001 it is intended to collocate the organisation on the site occupied by the procurement executive at Abbey Wood, in Bristol, although project contract management staff will remain at Devonport and Rosyth naval dockyards and at Portsmouth naval base.

The Ships Support Agency has developed a comprehensive set of performance indicators in conjunction with its owner and customers. These include measures to monitor the quality, timeliness and efficiency of the agency's outputs. The targets which have been agreed, for the period up to March 1997, are:

Materially Available Vessel Days (MAVDs)

1. To provide the Royal Navy with the agreed percentage of materially available vessel days: 62 per cent.

Pounds per MAVD

2. To provide the agreed Fleet availability cost-effectively: £5,000 per MAVD

To refine the £ MAVD Performance Indicator

3. Progress Report: March 1997

Upkeep Period Timeliness

4. To deliver upkeep periods within specified tolerances of the agreed programme: + 5 per cent.

Upkeep Period Costs

5. To contain the outturn cost of programmed upkeep periods within tolerance of the predicted cost: +/-5 per cent.

Upkeep Material Performance

6. To introduce a performance indicator to quantify material state at the conclusion of upkeep periods Progress report. March 1997

Fleet Time Material Performance

7. To limit the average number of outstanding operational defects per vessel in fleet time: 4

8. To introduce a performance indicator to measure the percentage of fleet time that vessels are unable for material reasons to meet their programmed task: March 1997

Efficient Stockholding

9. To improve stockholding to stock issue ration. 2.6:1

Resource Accounting

10. To ensure the implementation of the MOD accruals accounting system within the agency—progress report: March 1997

Through Life Costs

11. To create an effective through life cost model—Progress report. March 1997

Private Sector Involvement

12. To complete a review of the options for further Private Sector involvement in the support of vessels, equipment and weapons—Progress report. March 1997

Benchmarking

13. To draw up a comprehensive benchmarking programme: March 1997

Copies of the corporate plan and framework documents have been placed in the Library of the House.

Naval Bases and Supply Agency

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on defence agency status for the naval bases and supply organisation. [8702]

Mr. Soames: The directorate general naval bases and supply was formed within the naval support command in October 1995, bringing together management of the three naval bases with the navy's supply depots and the Director Marine Services (Navy).

The organisation is responsible in war, crisis and peace for:

providing ships and submarines with engineering and support services during fleet time;

the worldwide supply, storage and maintenance of armament, engineering and general stores, weapons and equipments;

the supply of food and fuel;

accommodation and Naval Personnel support in the naval bases,

thus contributing to the operational capability of the armed forces, together with other areas of the naval support command to ensure the overall material availability, capability and readiness of the Royal Navy and its weapon systems.

A wide ranging internal review since its formation has concluded that it would provide a better service to its customers as a Defence agency. It is therefore being launched on Wednesday 11 December as the Naval Bases and Supply Agency. NBSA will remain part of the MOD but the chief executive will have the necessary delegated powers to discharge his responsibilities.

Whilst the agency's main customer is the Commander-in-Chief Fleet, NBSA, as the provider of engineering and supply support, will work closely with the newly formed Ships Support Agency.

NBSA will be, in terms of staff, the largest Defence agency to launch, with some 13,350 staff, of which some 10,200 are civilian and 3,150 service. It will also be one of the more widespread, with sites from Devonport to the north of Scotland, including the three naval bases at Devonport, Portmouth and the Clyde, and a headquarters at Ensleigh, Bath.

NBSA has developed demanding targets and performance indicators in conjunction with its owner and customers. These are largely based on satisfying customer requirements, but also include measures to monitor and improve the quality, timeliness and efficiency of the agency's outputs. The key targets which have been agreed for the period up to March 1997 are:

(1) To complete 90 per cent. of vessel assisted maintenance periods to time, budget and standard by March 1997.

(2) To supply 90 per cent. of available material to rectify vessel operational defects within required delivery dates.

(3) To establish the NBSA cost per materially available vessel day by March 1997.

(4) To complete integration of the naval base management structures by April 1997, and to continue devolvement of tasks from HQ.

(5) To complete implementation of the DCS 10 infrastructure measures by March 1997.

(6) To implement the recommendations of the non-explosive warehousing review by March 1998—progress report in March 1997.

(7) To implement resource accounting and budgeting, including the provision of an executive information system to meet business requirements, by March 2000—progress report in March 1997.

(8) To establish the agency account by March 1998—progress report in March 1997.

(9) To achieve year-on-year efficiency improvements of 1.1 per cent. by March 1997.

(10) To achieve full accreditation of Investors in People by phased implementation.

All of these targets will encourage continuous improvements in NBSA services or efficiency.

WALES

Waiting Lists

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people have been waiting for an operation for more than a year in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [7235]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: At 30 September 1996, 5,303 people have been waiting more than a year to be admitted to hospital in Wales as an in-patient or day case. The number of these who were waiting for operations is not available centrally. However, it is estimated that, of the 253,000 in-patient and day cases in 1995–96 where an operation was performed and the waiting time recorded, 89,400—3 per cent.—had waited more than a year.

Beaches

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each year since 1991 those beaches in Wales which complied with the EU bathing water standard guide for *(a)* total and faecal coliforms, *(b)* faecal streptococci, and *(c)* coliforms and faecal streptococci combined. [7433]

Mr. Hague: The information requested has been placed in the Library of the House.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) he will list for each non-departmental agency for which he has responsibility *(a)* the date that it was set up and *(b)* the number of parliamentary questions which have been referred for answer to it in the 1994–95 parliamentary Session and in the 1995–96 Session to date; and if he will make a statement; [7465]

(2) how many parliamentary questions to his Department have been referred for answer to the chief executive or other senior official of a non-departmental agency for which he has responsibility in each of the last six parliamentary Sessions; and if he will make a statement. [7466]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 24 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *391*. So far in the 1996–97 parliamentary Session, 13 parliamentary questions have been referred to chief executives of non-departmental public bodies—NDPBs. No questions have been referred to the following bodies, established in the year given for each of: Land Authority for Wales (1975); National Museum of Wales (1907); National Library of Wales (1907); Sports Council for Wales (1972); Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (1994); Welsh National Board for Nursing, Health Visiting and Midwifery (1983); Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (1908); Higher Education Funding Council (1992); Further Education Funding Council (1993); Wales Youth Agency (1992); and the Residuary Body for Wales (1995).

For each of the other executives NDPBs, establishment dates and the total number of parliamentary questions referred to them in the parliamentary Sessions 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1996–97, are as follows:

NDPB	Establishment date	Parliamentary Session 1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
Welsh Development Agency	1976	12	15	3
Development Board for Rural Wales	1977	6	2	0
Wales Tourist Board	1969	1	0	0
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	1987	11	11	1
Countryside Council for Wales	1990	3	0	9
Welsh Language Board	1983	0	3	0
Arts Council for Wales	1994	4	6	0
Housing for Wales	1989	1	0	0
Total		38	37	13

Hospital Admissions

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of ordinary patient admissions by region in Wales in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [7480]

Mr. Hague: The information is given in the table. Data relating to NHS trusts are included in the former district health authority area in which they were situated.

Number of ordinary admissions (in-patients and day cases) to NHS Hospitals in Wales

District health authority	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96
Clwyd	98,959	102,566	108,352	107,250
Dyfed	82,558	89,779	92,484	95,802
Gwent	97,570	100,586	102,184	104,705
Gwynedd	49,419	52,787	54,675	57,174
Mid Glamorgan	128,787	134,907	146,329	150,887
Powys	9,967	10,253	11,248	11,328
South Glamorgan	113,785	115,080	119,412	125,377
West Glamorgan	87,118	103,607	118,713	125,213

NHS Trusts

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many NHS trusts in Wales *(a)* hold public meetings, *(b)* conduct public consultation exercises, *(c)* conduct consultation exercises with outside commercial interests, *(d)* publish a register of members' interests, *(e)* publish agendas for meetings and *(f)* publish the minutes of meetings; if he will indicate if this is in each case (i) under a statutory requirement or (ii) on a voluntary basis; and if he will make a statement. [7484]

Mr. Hague: All NHS trusts are required to hold public meetings for the presentation of the annual report including audited accounts and otherwise as prescribed under the NHS Trusts (Public Meetings) Regulations 1991. NHS trusts are not required to publish agendas or minutes of meetings.

The code of conduct and accountability for NHS boards issued by my Department in January 1995 states that a register of relevant interests should be made available to the public.

Information on trusts' non-statutory practices is not held centrally but is generally set out in their annual reports, which are held in the Library.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 5 December, *Official Report*, column *752–53*, on health trusts and authorities spending, if he will list for each health authority what changes have been made to the original revenue cash limits in the setting of the latest notified revenue cash limits. [8458]

Mr. Hague: Welsh health authorities have received the following changes to their initial revenue cash limits:

£000s

	Original cash limit	*Latest notified cash limit*
North Wales	342,095	373,586
Dyfed Powys	257,493	294,847
Morgannwg	257,808	299,945
Bro Taf	404,360	436,830
Gwent	280,322	304,698

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 5 December, *Official Report*, columns *752–53*, if he will list the estimated outturn for each trust and health authority for the full financial year 1996–97. [8455]

Mr. Hague: The latest estimated outturn for each trust and health authority for the financial year 1996–97 is given in the tables. It should be noted that a number of trusts are involved in continuing contractual negotiations with their commissioners which could be expected to improve their end-year position. It should be noted that the position for health authorities relates to cash drawings at 31 March 1997; the position for NHS trusts is the estimated income and expenditure position.

Table 1

Health Authority	*Estimated outturn £000s*
Bro Taf	436,830
Dyfed Powys	294,847
Gwent	304,698
Morgannwg	299,945
North Wales	373,586
Total	1,709,906

Table 2: Welsh NHS trust forecast surplus/(deficit)

£000s

	Forecast year-end position
Trust monitored quarterly (forecasts as at 30 September 1996)	
Bridgend	58
Cardiff Community	303
Carmarthen	(647)
Clwydian	267
Derwen	40
East Glamorgan	244
Glan Clwyd	213
Glan Hafren	253
Gwent Community	217
Gwynedd Community	184
Gwynedd Hospitals	382
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance	30
North Wales Ambulance	(99)
Rhondda	159
Swansea	108
UHW Dental	91
UHW	0
Velindre	119
West Wales Ambulance	21
Sub total	1,943
Trusts monitored monthly (forecasts as at 31 October 1996)	
Ceredigion	(480)
Glan y Mor	280
Llandough	(14)
Llanelli	215
Morriston	(3,095)
Nevill Hall	188
North Glamorgan	(415)
Pembroke	(255)
Powys	(12)
SEWAT	(326)
Wrexham	174
Sub total	(3,600)
Total	(1,657)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 5 December, *Official Report*, columns *752–53*, on health trusts and authorities spending, if he will list the principal steps he has asked those trusts in deficit to take to rectify their deficit. [8457]

Mr. Hague: Sound financial management, within the regulations of the trust financial regime, is the responsibility of the trust board. Trusts that have forecast a year-end deficient position, and which do not have sufficient reserves to meet this situation in-year, will be expected to devise a recovery plan. The plan should be formulated in conjunction with the trust's respective commissioners. Trusts are expected to return to a balanced position within an agreed time scale.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 5 December, *Official Report*, columns *752–53*, on health trusts and authorities spending, if he will list the equivalent figures for each health authority and trust at *(a)* the end of the first quarter for 1996–97, *(b)* the end of the first quarter 1995–96 and *(c)* the end of the second quarter 1996–97. [8459]

Mr. Hague: The further information requested is provided in the following table:

Table 1

£000

Health authority	*(a) as at 30 June 1996*	*(b) as at 30 June 1995*[1]	*(c) as at 30 September 1996*[2]
Bro Taf	112,064		
Dyfed Powys	68,727		
Gwent	72,785		
Morgannwg	72,094		
North Wales	89,764		
Total	415,434		

[1]There are no equivalent figures for cash expenditure at the end of the first quarter of 1995–96 since the responsibilities of the five health authorities were shared between the eight district health authorities and eight family health services authorities.

[2]The second quarter figures for 1996–97 for health authorities were given in my answer of 5 December.

Table 2

£000s

NHS trust	(a) As at 30 June 1996	(b) As at 30 June 1995	(c) As at 30 September 1996
Bridgend	(210)	(216)	
Cardiff Community	73	(29)	
Carmarthen	73	3	
Ceredigion	36	867	
Clwydian	444	35	
Derwen	165	25	
East Glamorgan	(12)	1,275	
Glan y Mor	(3)	[2]n/a	
Glan Clwyd	107	104	
Glan Hafren	(1,107)	997	
Gwent Community	43	(85)	
Gwynedd Community	588	548	
Gwynedd Hospitals	241	59	
Llandough	31	(66)	
Llanelli	(88)	(261)	
Mid. Glamorgan Ambulance	24	(139)	
Morriston	(853)	73	
Nevill Hall	51	100	
North Glam	164	[2]n/a	
North Wales Ambulance	255	305	
Pembroke	17	89	
Powys	0	82	
Rhondda	(53)	(52)	
Swansea	5	(13)	
SEWAT	(196)	(56)	
UHW Dental	55	346	
UHW	633	(1,930)	
Velindre	120	29	
West Wales Ambulance	197	27	
Wrexham	(146)	326	
Total	654	2,443	

(c) [1] The second quarter figures for 1996–97 for trusts were given in my answer of 5 December.
[2] Glan y Mor and North Glamorgan attained trust status on 1 April 1996.

Health Service Staff

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list by health authority in Wales the number of *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* midwives, *(d)* health visitors, *(e)* administration and clerical staff and (f) managers in (i) 1990, (ii) 1992, (iii) 1994 and (iv) 1995; and if he will make a statement; [7488]

(2) if he will list by health authority, trust or equivalent body the number of *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* midwives, *(d)* health visitors, *(e)* administration and clerical staff and (f) managers in Wales in (i) 1990, (ii) 1992 and (iii) 1994; and if he will make a statement. [7481]

Mr. Hague: The available information is given in the table. Information for nurses, midwives and health visitors is not available separately and, therefore, total nursing and midwifery staff is given.

Staff in post (whole-time equivalent numbers) at 30 September

Organisation[1]	Doctors[2] 1990	1992	1994	1995	Nursing and Midwifery staff[3] 1990	1992	1994	1995
Clwyd								
Clwydian Community Care NHS trust	n/a	n/a	61	59	n/a	n/a	1,523	1,415
Glan Clwyd Hospital NHS trust	n/a	n/a	160	170	n/a	n/a	881	893
North Wales Ambulance NHS trust[5]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS trust	n/a	n/a	141	146	n/a	n/a	861	887
District health authority/family health service authority	312	331	8	7	3,174	3,347	84	65
Total	312	331	369	381	3,174	3,347	3,349	3,260
Dyfed								
Carmarthen and District NHS trust	n/a	n/a	98	101	n/a	n/a	585	582
Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS trust	n/a	n/a	50	53	n/a	n/a	415	398
Derwen NHS trust	n/a	n/a	29	25	n/a	n/a	483	457
Llanelli Dinefwr NHS trust	n/a	n/a	64	67	n/a	n/a	533	530
Pembrokeshire NHS trust[6]	79	87	94	96	677	747	725	701
District health authority/family health service authority	223	224	8	7	2,043	2,052	7	5
Total	302	311	342	348	2,720	2,799	2,748	2,673
Gwent								
Glan Hafren NHS trust	n/a	n/a	237	254	n/a	n/a	1,464	1,427
Gwent Community NHS trust	n/a	n/a	66	66	n/a	n/a	1,250	1,216
Nevill Hall and District NHS trust	n/a	n/a	99	107	n/a	n/a	728	735
District health authority/family health service authority	362	391	7	7	4,014	3,864	66	14
Total	362	391	409	433	4,014	3,864	3,508	3,392
Gweynedd								
Gwynedd Community NHS trust	n/a	n/a	41	39	n/a	n/a	1,111	1,109
Gwynedd Hospital NHS trust	n/a	n/a	164	183	n/a	n/a	857	859
District health authority/family health service authority	175	193	4	7	1,912	1,968	36	26
Total	175	193	209	229	1,912	1,968	2,004	1,995

Staff in post (whole-time equivalent numbers) at 30 September

Organisation[1]	*Doctors*[2] 1990	1992	1994	1995	*Nursing and Midwifery staff*[3] 1990	1992	1994	1995
Mid Glamorgan								
Bridgend and District NHS trust	n/a	n/a	144	151	n/a	n/a	1,306	1,375
East Glamorgan NHS trust	n/a	n/a	143	135	n/a	n/a	733	747
Hensol health unit	n/a	n/a	2	3	n/a	n/a	420	392
Methyr Cynon health unit	n/a	n/a	122	118	n/a	n/a	1,045	1,030
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance NHS trust	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Parc hospital unit	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	72	1
Rhondda Health Care NHS trust	n/a	n/a	35	37	n/a	n/a	713	685
Rhymney Valley health unit	n/a	n/a	44	46	n/a	n/a	411	408
District health authority/family health service authority	423	452	8	7	4,777	4,901	90	18
Total	423	452	497	496	4,777	4,901	4,790	4,655
Powys								
Powys Health Care NHS trust	n/a	n/a	40	38	n/a	n/a	995	914
District health authority/family health service authority	42	43	4	4	1,059	1,044	n/a	n/a
Total	42	43	44	42	1,059	1,044	995	914

	Doctors[2] 1990	1992	1994	1995	*Nursing and Midwifery staff*[3] 1990	1992	1994	1995
South Glamorgan								
Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS trust	n/a	n/a	70	73	n/a	n/a	1,160	1,179
Llandough Hospital NHS trust	n/a	n/a	121	131	n/a	n/a	781	890
South and East Wales Ambulance NHS trust[7]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
University Dental Hospital NHS trust	n/a	n/a	1	1	n/a	n/a	9	8
University Hospital of Wales Health care NHS trust	n/a	n/a	494	502	n/a	n/a	2,282	2,076
Velindre NHS trust	n/a	n/a	20	21	n/a	n/a	86	97
District health authority family health service authority[8]	679	697	10	12	4,309	4,378	99	19
Total	679	697	715	739	4,309	4,378	4,418	4,269
West Glamorgan								
Glan-y-Mor NHS trust	n/a	n/a	n/a	125	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,496
Morriston NHS trust	n/a	n/a	168	179	n/a	n/a	1,006	1,118
Swansea NHS trust	n/a	n/a	136	156	n/a/	n/a	778	815
West Wales Ambulance NHS trust[9]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
District health authority/family health service authority[10]	339	389	145	7	3,043	3,181	1,551	64
Total	339	389	448	466	3,043	3,181	3,335	3,492
Welsh Health Common Services Authority[11]	4	14	10	10	10	73	73	79

Organisation[1]	*Administrative and clerical staff*[4] 1990	1992	1994	1995	*Managers* 1990	1992	1994	1995
Clwyd								
Clwydian Community Care NHS trust	n/a	n/a	330	335	n/a	n/a	54	52
Glan Clwyd Hospital NHS trust	n/a	n/a	297	315	n/a	n/a	29	28
North Wales Ambulance NHS trust[5]	n/a	n/a	34	51	n/a	n/a	6	11
Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS trust	n/a	n/a	267	275	n/a	n/a	30	32
District health authority/family health service authority	892	1,080	159	147	49	136	35	37
Total	892	1,080	1,087	1,123	49	136	154	159
Dyfed								
Carmarthen and District NHS trust	n/a	n/a	221	225	n/a	n/a	22	24
Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS trust	n/a	n/a	129	134	n/a	n/a	20	21
Derwen NHS trust	n/a	n/a	131	132	n/a	n/a	19	20
Llanelli Dinefwr NHS trust	n/a	n/a	142	146	n/a	n/a	19	22
Pembrokeshire NHS trust[6]	228	272	255	256	16	21	17	17
District health authority/family health service authority	635	742	149	136	34	70	39	36
Total	863	1,014	1,027	1,029	50	91	136	140

Organisation[1]	Administrative and clerical staff[2] 1990	1992	1994	1995	Managers[4] 1990	1992	1994	1995
Gwent								
Glan Hafren NHS trust	n/a	n/a	503	523	n/a	n/a	53	52
Gwent Community NHS trust	n/a	n/a	309	323	n/a	n/a	58	69
Nevill Hall and District NHS trust	n/a	n/a	194	196	n/a	n/a	18	20
District health authority/family health service authority	1,084	1,161	143	123	54	90	30	30
Total	1,084	1,161	1,151	1,165	54	90	159	171
Gwynedd								
Gwynedd Community NHS trust	n/a	n/a	256	265	n/a	n/a	23	25
Gwynedd Hospital NHS trust	n/a	n/a	296	293	n/a	n/a	14	9
District health authority/family service authority	571	673	87	89	21	66	28	27
Total	571	673	639	647	21	66	65	61
Mid Glamorgan								
Bridgend and District NHS trust	n/a	n/a	314	325	n/a	n/a	35	36
East Glamorgan NHS trust	n/a	n/a	240	262	n/a	n/a	20	23
Hensol health unit	n/a	n/a	35	37	n/a	n/a	4	4
Merthyr Cynon health unit	n/a	n/a	273	272	n/a	n/a	20	24
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance NHS trust	n/a	n/a	49	51	n/a	n/a	32	36
Parc hospital unit	n/a	n/a	7	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	n/a
Rhondda Health Care NHS trust	n/a	n/a	166	181	n/a	n/a	20	29
Rhymney Valley health unit	n/a	n/a	97	91	n/a	n/a	14	9
District health authority/family health service authority	1,185	1,365	248	201	32	103	42	40
Total	1,185	1,365	1,429	1,421	32	103	189	201
Powys								
Powys Health Care NHS trust	n/a	n/a	221	195	n/a	n/a	37	31
District health authority/family health service authority	227	268	58	57	26	39	16	16
Total	227	268	279	252	26	39	53	47

	1990	1992	1994	1995	1990	1992	1994	1995
South Glamorgan								
Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS trust	n/a	n/a	323	343	n/a	n/a	31	45
Llandough Hospital NHS trust	n/a	n/a	340	357	n/a	n/a	72	78
South and East Wales Ambulance NHS trust[7]	n/a	n/a	52	64	n/a	n/a	25	25
University Dental Hospital NHS trust	n/a	n/a	44	54	n/a	n/a	4	4
University Hospital of Wales Health care NHS trust	n/a	n/a	910	931	n/a	n/a	93	108
Velindre NHS trust	n/a	n/a	62	67	n/a	n/a	11	12
District health authority/family health service authority[8]	1,709	1,963	261	202	92	194	51	43
Total	1,709	1,963	1,992	2,019	92	194	286	315
West Glamorgan								
Glan-y-Mor NHS trust	n/a	n/a	n/a	410	n/a	n/a	n/a	30
Morriston NHS trust	n/a	n/a	282	361	n/a	n/a	22	38
Swansea NHS trust	n/a	n/a	249	263	n/a	n/a	17	17
West Wales Ambulance NHS trust[9]	n/a	n/a	n/a	57	n/a	n/a	n/a	6
District health authority/family health service authority[10]	978	1,094	609	137	67	89	59	24
Total	978	1,094	1,139	1,228	67	89	98	115
Welsh Health Common Services Authority[11]	675	880	1,161	991	46	86	153	141

[1] Organisations are listed under the name they had at 30 September 1995.
[2] Working in the hospital, community or public health service but excluding general medical practitioners.
[3] Excluding pre-registration learners.
[4] Including managers.
[5] Includes staff employed in the former Gwynedd DHA ambulance service.
[6] Pembrokeshire DHA in 1990.
[7] Includes staff employed in the former Gwent and Powys DHA ambulance service.
[8] Includes staff working in the South and East Wales Institute of Nursing.
[9] Includes staff employed by the former East Dyfed DHA ambulance service.
[10] Data for 1994 includes staff working in Glan-y-Mor NHS trust.
[11] Includes staff in Health Promotion Wales.
n/a = Not available.

Dental Services

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many NHS patients in Wales were registered with a dental practitioner in *(a)* April 1994, *(b)* April 1995 and *(c)* April 1996. [7490]

Mr. Hague: This information is as follows:

NHS patients in Wales registered with a dental practitioner

April 1994: 1,689,037

April 1995: 1,612,959

April 1996: 1,578,405

Asthma

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the mortality rates in respect of asthma in Wales for each of the last five years *(a)* among the whole population and *(b)* among under 16-year-olds; and if he will make a statement. [7483]

Mr. Hague: The information requested, provided by the Office for National Statistics, is in the table:

Asthma[1] deaths per million population; Welsh residents

	All ages	*Under 16*
1991	41	2
1992	45	2
1993	40	2
1994	31	3
1995	34	2

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision, code 493. Figures for 1991 and 1992 represent the number of deaths registered in each year, while the figures for 1993 onwards represent the number of deaths which occurred in each year. Also, new procedures for coding cause of death from 1993, and the absence of medical inquiries, mean that figures for 1993 onwards may not be exactly comparable with earlier years.

General Practitioners' Premises

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information his Department collates on the condition of general practitioners' premises; and what grants and loans have been made available for the construction and maintenance of general practitioners' premises in the last five years, by year and by health authority area. [7970]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Health authorities in Wales are responsible for collating these data. Grants to GPs for the construction and improvement of practice premises form part of the general medical services cash-limited allocation, which is administered at the discretion of the health authority. The general medical services cash-limited allocation increased by £4 million in 1996–97 to £59.2 million—an increase in real terms of 7.36 per cent.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of multi-drug-resistant TB have been diagnosed in each of the last five years. [7968]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: In Wales, in the past five years—to 4 December 1996—only two cases of tuberculosis with primary resistance to isoniazid and refampicin with or without resistance to other drugs have been diagnosed by the regional centre for mycobacteria at Cardiff public health laboratory, one in 1992 and one in 1995.

Housing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of housing association homes built in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1995; and what is his estimate for 1996. [7765]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information on housing association homes built is in table 5.1 of "Welsh Housing Statistics 1996", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Housing for Wales's target of completions for 1996–97 is 3,500, which includes new build, acquisitions and low-cost home ownership schemes.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of housing association homes to be built in 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [7766]

Mr. Evans: The information requested is not yet available.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he proposes to enable an adequate supply of homes for people on low incomes in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [7771]

Mr. Evans: Over the past five years, more than 21,000 affordable dwellings have been provided by housing associations. A further 2,000 low-cost homes for rent and purchase have been provided through our challenge fund initiatives. I will keep under review various indicators of housing demand.

PFI Schemes

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his Department's latest private finance initiative approved schemes. [8107]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 28 November 1996 to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), *Official Report*, column *403*.

Employment Initiatives

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the initiatives taken to improve the employment prospects for young people in Wales during each of the last three years, with in each case the financial commitments involved; and if he will make a statement. [7266]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Good education and training and sound careers advice are fundamental to a young person's employment prospects. Our programme of action to raise, strengthen standards and widen choice and opportunity is set out in "People and Prosperity: an Agenda for Action in Wales" which was published on 20 March 1995, and in the bright future programme to raise performance in schools.

In the light of these strategies, a wide range of action is being taken locally by education authorities, schools and colleges. Welsh Office funding for the past three years for training and education support programmes that are specifically designed to help young people, and delivered through the training and enterprise councils and local career services, is set out in the table.

£ million

	1994–95 Outturn	*1995–96 Outturn*	*1996–97 Planned expenditure*
Training for young people—including modern apprenticeships			
Accelerated modern apprenticeships and youth training youth credits[1]	39.408	43.201	53.008
Careers service	[2]n/a	13.911	12.336
TVEI	[3]4.963	—	—
Education business links	1.605	2.789	3.015
National record of achievement	0.118	0.141	0.157

[1] In addition, the Welsh Office has provided funding of £350,000, £150,000 and £500,000 in each of the last three years to TECs to support local initiatives to encourage disaffected young people to enter education, training or employment.

[2] Figures for the careers service are not available for 1994–95 as they were funded via LEAs.

[3] TVEI—technical and vocational education initiatives—came to an end in 1994–95.

Agri-environmental Schemes

Sir Jerry Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each of the agri-environmental schemes for which his Department is responsible, (i) actual expenditure in 1992–93, 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96, (ii) provision and estimated outturn of expenditure in 1996–97 and (iii) planned expenditure in 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000, distinguishing in each case between *(a)* payments to farmers, *(b)* running costs and *(c)* monitoring costs. [8009]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information requested for 1992–93 to 1996–97 is set out in the table. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will make a statement about future public expenditure in Wales shortly.

£ thousands

Scheme	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
(a) Payments to farmers					
Countryside access scheme	—	—	—	—	2
Environmentally sensitive areas	1,503	1,542	1,536	2,425	2,917
Habitat scheme	—	—	—	—	300
Moorland scheme	—	—	—	—	50
Organic aid scheme	—	—	—	7	50
Tir Cymen[1]	—	1,540	2,940	3,500	4,980
Total	1,503	3,082	4,476	5,932	8,299
(b) Running costs[2]	1,429	1,886	2,648	2,695	2,726
(c) Monitoring costs[2]	405	716	962	920	904

[1] Tir Cymen is operated by the Countryside Council for Wales.

[2] Information on running and monitoring costs for each individual scheme is not available.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8547]

Mr. Hague: The Welsh Office maintains its own register of people who are willing to be considered for appointment to public bodies in Wales and from time to time advertises for candidates.

Blood Stocks

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultation he has had with the chairman of the university hospital of Wales concerning the levels of blood transfusion stocks; and what assessment he has made of the impact which blood stock levels have had on non-emergency operations in the last 12 months. [8456]

Mr. Hague: None. Blood stock levels are a matter for the national Blood Transfusion Service (Wales) in discussion with the NHS trusts concerned.

SOCIAL SECURITY

State Pensions

12. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received in favour of allowing people to claim a state pension from 60 years of age; and if he will make a statement. [6856]

15. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the additional cost of paying a full state pension from 60 years. [6859]

16. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for the state retirement pension; and if he will make a statement. [6860]

26. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the current old-age pension provision. [6870]

Mr. Lilley: I have recently received only one representation in favour of allowing people to claim the state pension from age 60—from the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms Harman). To reduce the minimum age for claiming state pension to age 60 without increasing the burden on the taxpayer would mean that a single person would have a cut in their basic pension of £20 a week for the rest of their life.

13. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to change the method of payment of the state pension. [6857]

Mr. Heald: We are introducing a benefit payment card for those who wish to continue to receive their pensions and benefits at the Post Office. The change has started successfully with child benefit. We intend to test the system thoroughly before paying further benefits, including retirement pensions, by card. People who choose to have their pensions paid into a bank or building society will not be affected by this change.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the changes he has made in his policy towards the basic retirement pension in the current Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [6846]

Mr. Heald: In the 1995 Pensions Act we brought forward the following changes in the basic state retirement pension:

from 6 April 2010, over a period of 10 years the state pension age for women will gradually rise from age 60 to 65;

from 2010 both men and women will be able to defer claiming their pension indefinitely. The incremental rate will rise from 7.5 per cent. to 10.4 per cent. a year;

from 2010 the rules relating to derived rights pensions will be equalised so that both men and women will be able to claim category B retirement pension based on the contribution record of their spouse if their own record is insufficient for a category A retirement pension; and

from 2010 the rules for the award of adult dependency increases (ADI) will be simplified so that either a man or a woman of state pension age will be able to claim on ADI in respect of the younger spouse provided he or she does not have earnings, entitlement to another personal NI benefit or an occupational or personal pension which is more than the standard rate of unemployment benefit.

Benefit Payments (Non-UK Nationals)

14. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for issuing benefit payments to non-UK nationals. [6858]

Mr. Roger Evans: We have introduced significant changes to the Social Security regulations to narrow the access non-UK nationals have to the benefit system. The habitual residence test has dramatically reduced the number of awards of income support, jobseeker's allowance, housing benefit and council tax benefit claims to European non-UK nationals.

People from outside Europe are subject to immigration controls. Those whose right to reside or remain in Great Britain is subject to any limitation or condition cannot become a charge upon public funds. Regulations have been introduced that extend the list of benefits not available to this group to include all the non-contributory benefits, and restrict the benefit entitlement of asylum seekers.

Income-related Benefits

17. **Mr. Pope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the increase in social security expenditure on income-related benefits in real terms since 1979. [6861]

Mr. Burt: Income-related benefit expenditure rose from £8 billion in 1978–79 to £31.5 billion in 1995–96.

Although the number of people on income support has remained steady over the last four years, unemployment has fallen by over 950,000 since December 1992 and is still on a downward trend. This fall has been offset by increases in the number of pensioners, lone parents and people with disabilities claiming income support.

One-parent Families

18. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement concerning poverty in one-parent families. [6862]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: No Government have agreed on a simple or meaningful way to define poverty.

Many lone parents are less well off because they do not work. The Government have substantially enhanced in-work benefits to help them improve their living standards. Over 200,000 lone parents have moved into work supported by family credit since 1992, and from April 1997 the new parent plus scheme will pilot ways of helping up to 100,000 lone parents into work.

Incapacity Benefit

19. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about the operation of the all work test for incapacity benefit. [6863]

Mr. Burt: We have received a number of representations from hon. Members and members of the public.

During the development of the test the Department consulted widely and took account of the responses in designing the all work test and associate procedures.

Housing Benefit Fraud

20. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action his Department his taking to combat housing benefit fraud by landlords. [6864]

Mr. Heald: We have in place a comprehensive strategy for combating all housing benefit fraud, including landlord fraud. For example, this year we have provided £1 million in start-up funding for a pilot local authority team to tackle organised fraud across London borough boundaries. We propose to take further powers to detect and punish fraudsters, including fraudulent landlords, in the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill, now in Committee.

24. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what rewards and penalties he plans to give local authorities to encourage them to reduce housing benefit fraud. [6868]

Mr. Roger Evans: Each local authority is set a threshold of weekly benefit savings to be made through the detection of housing benefit and council tax benefit fraud. Local authorities can earn additional subsidy through performance in relation to their weekly benefit savings thresholds, and can have subsidy withheld for poor performance.

We are currently consulting the local authority associations on the proposed arrangements for 1997–98.

The Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill contains proposals to strengthen my right hon. Friend's powers to increase subsidy to encourage local authorities to combat fraud and clarifies his existing broad powers to reduce subsidy.

Child Support Agency

21. **Ms Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received about the Child Support Agency. [6865]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: We regularly receive representations from a wide variety of sources. While many continue to involve cases in which the standard of service is still not as good as we would like, they reveal a growing acceptance that child support is a permanent feature of British life and that the agency is showing continuing improvements in performance.

Lone Parents

23. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the number of lone parents on *(a)* income support in the United Kingdom and *(b)* on comparable benefits in other EU countries. [6867]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: At the end of November 1995 there were 1,095,000 income support recipients in the United Kingdom receiving the lone parent premium. Social assistance benefits in other EU countries are not strictly comparable with income support: countries such as Greece, Portugal and Italy have very limited schemes; some schemes are local, others national; and most other countries require lone parents to be available for work even when they have children of school age.

Notes:

1. The figure has been rounded to the nearest thousand.

2. The figure given is the number of income support recipients who receive the lone-parent premium. This excludes some one parent families who receive a higher-value premium by reason of age and/or disability.

Source:

"Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry" November 1995.

"Northern Ireland 100 per cent Income Support Caseload" count.

Housing Benefit

25. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the expenditure on housing benefit in *(a)* 1985–86 and *(b)* 1995–96; and what was the real terms change over that period. [6896]

Mr. Roger Evans: In 1995–96 prices, expenditure on housing benefit was £5,054 billion for 1985–86 and £10.848 billion for 1995–96. The real terms increase over the period was just under 115 per cent. Overall Government subsidies to housing during the 1990s have remained more or less stable in real terms.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the planned restrictions on housing benefit payments to private deregulated tenants will apply to tenants of properties managed under the housing associations as management agents scheme. [7243]

Mr. Roger Evans: Yes. However, claimants exempted from the local reference rent and single room rent rules would not be affected by the proposed restrictions.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultations his Department had with representatives of private landlords prior to his announcement of proposed restrictions on housing benefit payments to tenants of private deregulated properties. [7244]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Government receive from time to time representations on all aspects of Social Security matters. The recent announcement of the proposed changes to restrict housing benefit has been referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee for its consideration. These proposed changes will also be the subject of consultation with the local authority associations. Representatives of private landlords, as well as others with an interest in these proposals will have ample opportunity to make their views known. The Government will consider carefully all representations before taking final decisions.

Reduced Earnings Allowances

27. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the amounts saved by the withdrawal of the reduced earnings allowances; and how many people have lost their allowances. [6871]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have him on 14 October, *Official Report*, column *775* and to the answer I gave to the hon. member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 12 November, *Official Report*, column *195*.

28. **Mr. Stephen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the additional cost to public funds of linking pensions to earnings since 1980. [6872]

29. **Mr. Richards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received in respect of uprating pensions in line with prices rather than earnings. [6873]

Mr Heald: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Rydale (Mr. Greenway).

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to reimburse local authorities for additional costs incurred as a result of changes to regulations concerning asylum seekers. [6866]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Government intend, subject to parliamentary approval, to make funds available through a special grant to meet reasonable costs incurred by local authorities who are supporting asylum seekers under the National Assistance Act 1948.

Regulations

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many regulations he referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95, *(c)* 1995–96 and *(d)* 1996 to date; and in how many of these references he followed the committee's recommendations in full. [6725]

Mr. Burt: When the Social Security Advisory Committee exercises its powers under the Social Security Administration Act 1992 to have proposals for regulations formally referred, its report is published as a command paper, which includes the Secretary of State's response to the committee's recommendations. Copies of the reports are available in the Library. Since April 1993 reports have been published on the following regulations:

Title	*Command paper number*	*Date of publication*
The Income Support (General) Amendment No. 3 Regulations 1993	Cm 2272	July 1993
The Social Security Benefit (Persons from Abroad) Amendment Regulations 1994	Cm 2450	February 1994

Title	Command paper number	Date of publication
The Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (Amendment) Regulations 1994	Cm 2483	March 1994
The Income Support (General) Amendment Regulations 1994	Cm 2537	April 1994
The Income-related Benefits Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 3) Regulations 1994	Cm 2609	July 1994
The Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Income Support (Amendments) Regulations 1995	Cm 2783	March 1995
The Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Amendment Regulations 1995	Cm 2858	May 1995
The Housing Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1995	Cm 2902	June 1995
The Social Security (Income Support and Claims and Payments) Amendment Regulations 1995	Cm 2905	June 1995
The Social Security (Persons from Abroad) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1996	Cm 3062	January 1996
The Housing Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1996	Cm 3225	April 1996
The Draft Child Benefit, Child Support and Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1996	Cm 3296	June 1996
The Family Credit (General) Amendment Regulations 1996	Cm 3297	June 1996
The Social Security (Disability Living Allowance and Claims and Payments) Amendments Regulations 1996	Cm 3233	June 1996
The Income-Related Benefits and Jobseeker's Allowance (Personal Allowances for Children and Young Persons) (Amendment) Regulations 1996	Cm 3393	October 1996

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many recipients of *(a)* incapacity benefit, *(b)* severe disablement allowance and *(c)* invalid care allowance have earnings from employment; how many claimants of (i) incapacity benefit, (ii) severe disablement allowance, (iii) invalid care allowance, (iv) maternity allowance and (v) retirement pension receive increases for adult dependants where the dependant only has earnings; and in how many cases both claimant and partner have earnings. [6727]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Details of the earnings of claimants and their partners is collected only when this has direct relevance to the entitlement conditions of the benefit being claimed.

	Number
Invalid care allowance recipients receiving earnings from employment at 18 November 1996	[1]26,497
Incapacity benefit cases where Adult Dependency Increase (ADI) reduced because of earnings of adult dependant	[2]920
Incapacity benefit cases where ADI extinguished because of earnings of adult dependant	[2]8,000
Severe disablement allowance cases where ADI reduced because of earnings of adult dependant	[2]20
Severe disablement allowance cases where ADI extinguished because of earnings of adult dependant	[2]140

[1] 100 per cent. count of cases.
[2] 5 per cent. sample of the incapacity benefit computer system. Excludes a small number of cases not on the system. Subject to sampling error due to small number of cases.
Figures are at 31 May 1996 unless otherwise stated.

Mortgage Interest Payments

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of *(a)* the cost and *(b)* the numbers gaining if entitlement to mortgage interest payments as currently payable with income support were extended to (i) family credit and (ii) disability working allowance. [6731]

Mr. Roger Evans: The cost of extending help with mortgage interest payments would be £1.1 billion in family credit and £17 million in disability working allowance.

The measure would help 515,000 people in family credit and 5,000 in disability working allowance including people who would become newly entitled as a result.

Notes:

1. It is not possible to estimate the effect of the October 1995 income support mortgage interest changes which introduced new waiting periods and the standard interest rate for calculating help.
2. Data have been modelled on the 1994–95 family resources survey (FRS), uprated to 1996–97 price and benefit levels.
3. Amounts have been rounded to the nearest £100 million in family credit and £1 million in disability working allowance.
4. Caseloads have been rounded to the nearest 5,000 in family credit and 1,000 in disability working allowance.
5. The number of people becoming newly entitles to benefit is estimated at 265,000 in family credit and 3,000 in disability working allowance.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the savings which will accrue to his Department as a result of the Social Security (Disability Living Allowance and Claims and Payments) Amendment Regulations 1996 (S.I. 1996 No. 1436); and if he will make a statement. [7039]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Savings are estimated to be in the region of between £40 and £45 million for 1997–98 and 1998–99. Actual savings are kept under review and revised as necessary as new data become available.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average cost of dealing with an application for disability living allowance which goes to *(a)* review and *(b)* appeal. [6737]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mrs. Alice Mahon, dated 9 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what is the average cost of dealing with an application for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) which to *(a)* review and *(b)* appeal.

The following information reflects the average operational staffing costs involved in the processing of both reviews and appeals relating to DLA.

Cost of processing a DLA claim: £50[1]

Cost of processing a Review for DLA: £22

Cost of processing an appeal for DLA: £59[2]

[1] This figure incorporates the new measures for administrative tightening.

[2] This figure incorporates an element from fielding a presenting Officer at the tribunal hearing.

[3] The above figures reflect the cost of processing to the implementation of a decision. Costs relating to the arrangement of Disability Appeals Tribunal (DAT) hearings is held by the Independent Tribunal Service. The average cost of an appeal session, from April to October 1996, for DLA is £343 with on average, 3.37 cases heard per session. This figure reflects the cost for the appellant and the DAT members only.

The costs are rounded to the nearest pound.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

EU Payroll Costs

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those countries in Europe where social, welfare or pension charges on the payroll costs of employers have been changed following the imposition of a directive from the European Union. [7013]

Mr. Burt: The information is not available.

Compensation Recovery Scheme

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes he is proposing to introduce to the compensation recovery scheme; when the changes will be introduced; and if repayments will be made to those people who have already paid. [7987]

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchcliffe) on 7 November, *Official Report,* columns 681-82.

Disability Discrimination Act

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his Department will monitor the car insurance industry, following the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, to ascertain whether insurers charge higher premiums on vehicles that have been modified for the disabled. [7808]

Mr. Burt: The Government will monitor the Disability Discrimination Act in order to assess its effectiveness in combatting discrimination. The National Disability Council will also provide advice to the Government on matters relevant to the elimination of discrimination and the operation of the Act.

CSA Chief Executive

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what date he was informed that the chief executive of the Child Support Agency intended to take up her new post with Business in the Community. [8110]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has known since February 1996 that Miss Chant would not be undertaking a further extension of her contract beyond March 1997.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans there are to give preference to non-civil service candidates in filling the post of chief executive of the Child Support Agency. [8112]

Mr. Mitchell: None. All candidates will be treated equally.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans there are to advertise the post of chief executive of the Child Support Agency *(a)* within the civil service and *(b)* outside it. [8111]

Mr. Mitchell: Permanent secretaries in other Government Departments have been asked to circulate details of the post to prospective candidates;

The post was also advertised in the national press on 8 December 1996 and will be again on 12 December 1996. Executive search is also being carried out on the Department's behalf by recruitment consultants.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what initial period of contract will be offered to the next chief executive of the Child Support Agency. [8113]

Mr. Mitchell: Five years.

Changes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list each social security change since 1979 and for each the net gain or loss to public expenditure *(a)* for each year since the change took effect and *(b)* cumulatively for each change to date; and what has been the net change to public expenditure totals of the changes to date. [8128]

Mr. Burt: The main developments in Social Security since the second world war—together with details of expenditure by benefit since 1979—are set out in "The Growth of Social Security", which was published in 1993.

Further information is provided in public expenditure White Papers from 1979 to 1990 and—from 1991 to date—departmental reports of the Department of Social Security. Copies of all documents are in the Library.

Housebuilding Industry

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultations he undertook with the housebuilding industry prior to the publication of the booklet entitled, "Are Your Workers Employed or

Self-Employed"; what representations he has received from housebuilders since the publication of that booklet; and if he will make a statement. [8553]

Mr. Heald: A wide range of representative bodies from the construction industry, including the housebuilding industry, were involved in joint consultations with officials from the Department and the Inland Revenue before the publication of the booklet.

Since October 1995 we have had numerous representations and meetings at official and ministerial level from the industry. Details of the help provided for the construction industry on employment status are set out in a joint Inland Revenue and Contributions Agency press release issued on 19 November 1996, copies of which are available in the Library.

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to consult *(a)* the Housebuilders Federation, *(b)* the Manufacturing and Construction Industries Alliance and *(c)* other bodies representing the interests of housebuilders and their workers, before making any changes to the convention that construction operatives in the housebuilding sector are considered as self-employed for national insurance purposes. [8556]

Mr. Heald: We have already developed contacts with a wide range of representatives bodies from the construction industry, including groups representing members of the housebuilding industry. We will continue to work closely with these contacts on the issue of employment status in the industry.

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the costs for employers in the housebuilding sector of the recent ending of self-employed status for construction operatives, in terms of *(a)* employers' national insurance, *(b)* employees' national insurance, *(c)* other taxes; and *(d)* administrative and payroll costs. [8554]

Mr. Heald: It is incorrect to say that self-employed status has been ended for construction workers. As in other industries, contractors will continue to be free to take on workers as self-employed where the terms and conditions of engagement reflect genuine self-employment.

Sir Michael Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for how many years construction operatives in the housebuilding sector have been considered to be self-employed for national insurance purposes; when, by whom and for what reasons the decision was taken to change that status; and if he will make a statement. [8555]

Mr. Heald: Since 1980, the administrative practice of the Department has been to accept that the issue by the Inland Revenue of a 714 certificate or deduction from payments under the SC60 scheme were evidence of self employment. Following representations from the construction industry claiming that many workers treated as self-employed were really employees, the Inland Revenue and Department of Social Security prepared new guidance for the industry about employment status. This made it clear that whether someone is employed or self-employed depends on the terms of engagement not the issue of a 714 certificate.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8539]

Mr. Burt: None. The public appointments unit is routinely consulted when public appointments are made to this Department's public bodies. Many of the public bodies are of a specialist nature, and the appointees are drawn from a specialist field. When the PAU is consulted, any names given may duplicate those from other sources.

Child Support

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures are planned to assist applicants under the proposed departure directions procedure in obtaining evidence to support allegations of inconsistent lifestyle. [8124]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 9 December 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about applications for a departure from the maintenance formula on the grounds that a parent's lifestyle is inconsistent with the income on which their maintenance assessment is based.

You asked what measures are planned to assist applicants in gathering evidence to support their application for a departure direction on this ground. While the departures scheme places the onus on the applicant to justify the validity of their application, it is recognised that in such cases, conclusive written evidence will not always be available. Providing there is some indication of a genuine case to consider, it is intended that the decision on the application will be based on a balanced view of all the evidence, even when not supported by documentary evidence.

It may be helpful if I outline how applications on this ground will be dealt with. The Agency will first establish that the application is valid and that there is some indication that the parent's overall lifestyle is substantially inconsistent with the level of income on which the maintenance assessment is based. Cases will be refused at this stage if it appears that there is no likelihood of the application succeeding, for example, if the applicant states only that the other parent goes abroad for a holiday or has a better lifestyle than their own. If the application is refused at this point, the parent making the application will have a right of appeal.

Cases that are not refused will be referred to a Child Support Appeal Tribunal for a decision. It will be for the Tribunal to decide what evidence it needs and how to balance the information provided by both parents in reaching its decision. There are also powers to hold "direction hearings" in advance of the Tribunal. These provide the Chairman with the opportunity to direct either parent to provide any further evidence considered necessary.

I hope this explanation reassures you that, whilst some reasonable degree of responsibility must rest with the applicant to justify their application, it is accepted that they will not always be in a position to provide full supporting documentary evidence; and that failure to do so will not automatically result in the application being refused. A balance must be struck however, to prevent vexatious or malicious applications from getting into the system.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Wicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of child support cases involving self-employed absent parents concerned parents with care who were claiming income support, family credit or disability working allowance. [8123]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Malcolm Wicks, dated 9 December 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency self employed cases.

There are currently around 20,000 self employed absent parents cases, live on Child Support Computer System, with a full maintenance assessment. The benefit status of the associated parents with care is not, however, currently available.

I hope this is helpful.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 11 December 1996

TREASURY

Computers

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Bank of England is taking to ensure the single currency compliancy of its computer systems, and those with which they are connected; what is its budget for this purpose; and if he will make a statement. [6661]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Bank of England's computer systems will be affected by the introduction of the euro whether or not the United Kingdom adopts the single currency. Work to assess the implications and to ensure preparedness started some time ago. The bank is also liaising with the Association for Payment Clearing Services, which oversees the banking payments systems, and with the commercial banks. No separate budget has yet been set for this process.

Tax Law Rewrite

Mr. Forman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Inland Revenue will publish the document giving the plans and arrangements for the tax law rewrite, referred to in his 1996 Budget statement. [8931]

Mr. Jack: I am very pleased to be able to report on the good progress that has been made on the tax law rewrite. The Inland Revenue has today published a document which sets out the response to its consultations on this project to rewrite tax law in clearer and simpler language. I am placing copies in the Libraries of the House.

This document takes full account of the comments received. It sets out the resulting plans and arrangements for taking the rewrite forward, so that the first rewrite Bill will be ready for enactment in the 1997–98 parliamentary Session.

This is a very important and worthwhile project which will bring the benefits of clarity and certainty to businesses and ordinary taxpayers alike. We are committed to proceeding with it on the basis of full consultation.

Mr. Forman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer who will be the members of the tax law rewrite steering committee being chaired by the right hon. the Lord Howe of Aberavon CH, QC. [8932]

Mr. Jack: The steering committee will play a crucial role in the rewrite project. Under the chairmanship of the right hon. the Lord Howe of Aberavon CH, QC, the committee will guide the project through the challenges that lie ahead, while ensuring that it keeps to its objectives.

The committee combines the talents and experience of a wide range of members drawn from Parliament, the legal and accountancy professions, consumer interests and the private sector.

I am delighted to announce today that the other members of the committee will be the right hon. Sir John Balcombe, Mr. Ian Barlow, Dr. John Avery Jones CBE, Mr. Steve Matheson CB, Dr. John Marek MP, Ms Sheila McKechnie OBE, Sir John Shaw and Mr. Tim Smith MP. I am sure that this important project will benefit greatly from their experience.

Taxation

Mr. Darling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his answer to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) of 26 February, *Official Report*, columns *339–52*, to take account of *(a)* changes made in the Budget, and to provide his latest estimates of the burden of direct and indirect taxes for 1997–98, *(b)* revisions to figures for earlier years and *(c)* separate figures for (i) VAT, (ii) other indirect taxes and (iii) the council tax. [5195]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 27 November 1996]:* The tables show estimates of tax payments for the requested specimen households for the years 1994–95 to 1997–98.

The main factors accounting for the increase in payments between years are growth in earnings and inflation. The figures for tax payments do not measure the effects of changes in tax rates, allowances, etcetera. A one-earner couple on average earnings with two children will pay £88 less in income tax and national insurance contributions next year than if these taxes had been left unchanged since 1991–92, apart from indexation.

Real take-home pay for all these households will rise next year and will be substantially higher than in 1991–92. For the family on average earnings, the increase next year will be £370, bringing the total rise since 1991–92 to over £1,100. These increases take account of all taxes as well as earnings growth and inflation. Other factors are also boosting living standards, such as the lowest mortgage rates for 30 years and the rise in employment by ¾ million since 1992.

The figures for tax payments are subject to important limitations. The estimates of indirect tax payments are very approximate. They are based on the assumption that these taxes are fully passed on in prices, which may not hold in practice. They also assume particular spending patterns by the households whereas in practice there are wide variations in spending on taxed goods, and hence in indirect tax payments, between households with similar incomes and compositions. Nor do the estimates include the effects of changes in tax on savings, particularly the reduction in the tax rate on savings income to 20 per cent. for basic rate payers or the growth in tax-free tax-exempt special savings accounts and personal equity plans, as the households specified have income only from earnings. The overall tax burden—total taxes and national insurance contributions as a percent of GDP—which includes the impact of all taxes is expected to be at the same level next year as in 1991–92.

Income tax, national insurance and indirect taxes at multiples of average earnings 1994–95 *Percentage of male average earnings*

	50	75	100	150	200	300	400	500	700	1,000	2,000
Single person											
£ per week											
Gross income	184.55	276.83	369.10	553.65	738.20	1,107.30	1,476.40	1,845.50	2,583.70	3,691.00	7,382.00
NICs	13.90	23.12	32.35	38.44	38.44	38.44	38.44	38.44	38.44	38.44	38.44
Income tax	26.69	49.76	72.83	123.71	197.53	345.17	492.81	640.45	935.73	1,378.65	2,855.05
VAT		14.84	19.78	30.29							
Other indirect taxes		20.05	25.53	37.19							
Total excluding council tax		107.78	150.49	229.63							
Council tax		7.10	7.34	7.87							
Real take-home pay (1996–97 prices)	151.79	215.02	278.26	412.77	529.52	763.01	996.50	1,230.00	1,696.98	2,397.46	4,732.38
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	7.5	8.4	8.8	6.9	5.2	3.5	2.6	2.1	1.5	1.0	0.5
Income tax	14.5	18.0	19.7	22.3	26.8	31.2	33.4	34.7	36.2	37.4	38.7
VAT		5.4	5.4	5.5							
Other indirect taxes		7.2	6.9	6.7							
Total excluding council tax		38.9	40.8	41.5							
Council tax		2.6	2.0	1.4							
Married couple, one earner: no children											
£ per week											
Gross income	184.55	276.83	369.10	553.65	738.20	1,107.30	1,476.40	1,845.50	2,583.70	3,691.00	7,382.00
NICs	13.90	23.12	32.35	38.44	38.44	38.44	38.44	38.44	38.44	38.44	38.44
Income tax	20.08	43.14	66.21	117.09	190.91	338.55	486.19	633.83	929.11	1,372.03	2,848.43
VAT		15.34	20.84	32.54							
Other indirect taxes		21.47	25.61	34.43							
Total excluding council tax		103.08	145.01	222.50							
Council tax		9.36	10.06	11.54							
Real take-home pay (1996–97 prices)	158.76	222.00	285.24	419.75	536.49	769.98	1,003.48	1,236.97	1,703.96	2,404.43	4,739.36
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	7.5	8.4	8.8	6.9	5.2	3.5	2.6	2.1	1.5	1.0	0.5
Income tax	10.9	15.6	17.9	21.1	25.9	30.6	32.9	34.3	36.0	37.2	38.6
VAT		5.5	5.6	5.9							
Other indirect taxes		7.8	6.9	6.2							
Total excluding council tax		37.2	39.3	40.2							
Council tax		3.4	2.7	2.1							
Married couple, one earner: 2 children											
£ per week											
Gross income	184.55	276.83	369.10	553.65	738.20	1,107.30	1,476.40	1,845.50	2,583.70	3,691.00	7,382.00
NICs	13.90	23.12	32.35	38.44	38.44	38.44	38.44	38.44	38.44	38.44	38.44
Income tax (less child benefit)	1.63	24.69	47.76	98.64	172.46	320.10	467.74	615.38	910.66	1,353.58	2,829.98
VAT		15.33	20.30	30.88							
Other indirect taxes		24.99	28.01	34.43							
Total excluding council tax		88.13	128.42	202.40							
Council tax		8.72	9.21	10.27							
Real take-home pay (1996–97 prices)	178.21	241.45	304.69	439.20	555.94	789.44	1,022.93	1,256.42	1,723.41	2,423.89	4,758.81
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	7.5	8.4	8.8	6.9	5.2	3.5	2.6	2.1	1.5	1.0	0.5
Income tax (less child benefit)	0.9	8.9	12.9	17.8	23.4	28.9	31.7	33.3	35.2	36.7	38.3
VAT		5.5	5.5	5.6							
Other indirect taxes		9.0	7.6	6.2							
Total excluding council tax		31.8	34.8	36.6							
Council tax		3.1	2.5	1.9							
Married couple, 2 earners: no children: Earnings split 60:40											
£ per week											
Gross income	184.55	276.83	369.10	553.65	738.20	1,107.30	1,476.40	1,845.50	2,583.70	3,691.00	7,382.00
NICs	9.34	18.56	27.79	46.25	63.41	76.88	76.88	76.88	76.88	76.88	76.88
Income tax	3.79	24.36	46.77	92.90	139.04	252.67	388.44	536.08	831.36	1274.28	2750.68
VAT		16.67	22.14	32.98							
Other indirect taxes		24.78	29.92	40.08							
Total excluding council tax		84.37	126.62	212.20							
Council tax		9.55	9.74	10.12							
Real take-home pay (1996–97 prices)	180.73	246.61	310.55	437.02	564.86	820.01	1,066.01	1,299.50	1,766.49	2,466.97	4,801.89

Income tax, national insurance and indirect taxes at multiples of average earnings 1994–95 *Percentage of male average earnings*

	50	75	100	150	200	300	400	500	700	1,000	2,000
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	5.1	6.7	7.5	8.4	8.6	6.9	5.2	4.2	3.0	2.1	1.0
Income tax	2.1	8.8	12.7	16.8	18.8	22.8	26.3	29.0	32.2	34.5	37.3
VAT		6.0	6.0	6.0							
Other indirect taxes		9.0	8.1	7.2							
Total excluding council tax		30.5	34.3	38.3							
Council tax		3.5	2.6	1.8							

Income tax, national insurance and indirect taxes at multiples of average earnings 1995–96 *Percentage of male average earnings*

	50	75	100	150	200	300	400	500	700	1000	2000
Single person											
£ per week											
Gross income	190.60	285.90	381.20	571.80	762.40	1,143.60	1,524.80	1,906.00	2,668.40	3,812.00	7,624.00
NICs	14.42	23.95	33.48	39.36	39.36	39.36	39.36	39.36	39.36	39.36	39.36
Income tax	27.63	51.45	75.28	128.43	204.67	357.15	509.63	662.11	967.07	1,424.51	2,949.31
VAT		15.06	20.08	30.75							
Other indirect taxes		21.75	27.66	40.21							
Total excluding council tax		112.20	156.49	238.76							
Council tax		7.51	7.77	8.32							
Real take-home pay (1996–97 prices)	151.72	214.99	278.25	412.62	529.42	763.02	996.61	1,230.21	1,697.40	2,398.19	4,734.15
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	7.6	8.4	8.8	6.9	5.2	3.4	2.6	2.1	1.5	1.0	0.5
Income tax	14.5	18.0	19.7	22.5	26.8	31.2	33.4	34.7	36.2	37.4	38.7
VAT		5.3	5.3	5.4							
Other indirect taxes		7.6	7.3	7.0							
Total excluding council taxes		39.2	41.1	41.8							
Council tax		2.6	2.0	1.5							
Married couple, one earner: no children											
£ per week											
Gross income	190.60	285.90	381.20	571.80	762.40	1,143.60	1,524.80	1,906.00	2,668.40	3,812.00	7,624.00
NICs	14.42	23.95	33.48	39.36	39.36	39.36	39.36	39.36	39.36	39.36	39.36
Income tax	22.66	46.49	70.31	123.47	199.71	352.19	504.67	657.15	962.11	1,419.55	2,944.35
VAT		15.37	20.96	32.83							
Other indirect taxes		23.45	27.87	37.27							
Total excluding council tax		109.26	152.63	232.93							
Council tax		9.87	10.60	12.15							
Real take-home pay (1996–97 prices)	156.79	220.05	283.32	417.69	534.49	768.08	1001.68	1235.28	1702.47	2403.26	4739.22
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	7.6	8.4	8.8	6.9	5.2	3.4	2.6	2.1	1.5	1.0	0.5
Income tax	11.9	16.3	18.4	21.6	26.2	30.8	33.1	34.5	36.1	37.2	38.6
VAT		5.4	5.5	5.7							
Other indirect taxes		8.2	7.3	6.5							
Total excluding council tax		38.2	40.0	40.7							
Council tax		3.5	2.8	2.1							
Married couple, one earner: 2 children											
£ per week											
Gross income	190.60	285.90	381.20	571.80	762.40	1,143.60	1,524.80	1,906.00	2,668.40	3,812.00	7,624.00
NICs	14.42	23.95	33.48	39.36	39.36	39.36	39.36	39.36	39.36	39.36	39.36
Income tax (less child benefit)	3.81	27.64	51.46	104.62	180.86	333.34	485.82	638.30	943.26	1,400.70	2,925.50
VAT		15.36	20.42	31.16							
Other indirect taxes		27.34	30.60	37.51							
Total excluding council tax		94.29	135.96	212.64							
Council tax		9.20	9.72	10.82							
Real take-home pay (1996–97 prices)	176.04	239.31	302.57	436.94	553.74	787.33	1,020.93	1,254.53	1,721.72	2,422.51	4,758.47
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	7.6	8.4	8.8	6.9	5.2	3.4	2.6	2.1	1.5	1.0	0.5
Income tax (less child benefit)	2.0	9.7	13.5	18.3	23.7	29.1	31.9	33.5	35.3	36.7	38.4
VAT		5.4	5.4	5.4							
Other indirect taxes		9.6	8.0	6.6							
Total excluding council tax		33.0	35.7	37.2							
Council tax		3.2	2.5	1.9							

Income tax, national insurance and indirect taxes at multiples of average earnings 1995–96 *Percentage of male average earnings*

	50	*75*	*100*	*150*	*200*	*300*	*400*	*500*	*700*	*1000*	*2000*
Married couple, 2 earners, no children: Earnings split 60:40											
£ per week											
Gross income	190.60	285.90	381.20	571.80	762.40	1,143.60	1,524.80	1,906.00	2,668.40	3,812.00	7,624.00
NICs	9.78	19.31	28.84	47.90	65.22	78.72	78.72	78.72	78.72	78.72	78.72
Income tax	6.04	27.21	50.29	97.94	145.59	263.55	404.38	556.86	861.82	1,319.26	2,844.06
VAT		16.69	22.27	33.28							
Other indirect taxes		26.94	32.64	43.93							
Total excluding council tax		90.15	134.04	223.05							
Council tax		10.11	10.31	10.71							
Real take-home pay (1996–97 prices)	178.50	244.48	308.51	435.04	563.35	818.41	1063.91	1297.50	1764.69	2465.48	4801.44
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	5.1	6.8	7.6	8.4	8.6	6.9	5.2	4.1	3.0	2.1	1.0
Income tax	3.2	9.5	13.2	17.1	19.1	23.0	26.5	29.2	32.3	34.6	37.3
VAT		5.8	5.8	5.8							
Other indirect taxes		9.4	8.6	7.7							
Total excluding council tax		31.5	35.2	39.0							
Council tax		3.5	2.7	1.9							

Income tax, national insurance and indirect taxes at multiples of average earnings 1996–97 *Percentage of male average earnings*

	50	*75*	*100*	*150*	*200*	*300*	*400*	*500*	*700*	*1000*	*2000*
Single person											
£ per week											
Gross income	197.75	296.63	395.50	593.25	791.00	1,186.50	1,582.00	1,977.50	2,768.50	3,955.00	7,910.00
NICs	14.90	24.78	34.67	40.62	40.62	40.62	40.62	40.62	40.62	40.62	40.62
Income tax	27.08	50.81	74.54	126.88	205.98	364.18	522.38	680.58	996.98	1,471.58	3,053.58
VAT		16.41	21.91	33.66							
Other indirect taxes		23.27	29.63	43.23							
Total excluding council tax		115.27	160.75	244.38							
Council tax		7.74	8.01	8.57							
Real take-home pay Percentage of male average earnings (1996–97 prices)	155.77	221.03	286.29	425.75	544.40	781.70	1,019.00	1,256.30	1,730.90	2,442.80	4,815.80
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	7.5	8.4	8.8	6.8	5.1	3.4	2.6	2.1	1.5	1.0	0.5
Income tax	13.7	17.1	18.8	21.4	26.0	30.7	33.0	34.4	36.0	37.2	38.6
VAT		5.5	5.5	5.7							
Other indirect taxes		7.8	7.5	7.3							
Total excluding council tax		38.9	40.6	41.2							
Council tax		2.6	2.0	1.4							
Married couple, one earner: no children											
£ per week											
Gross income	197.75	296.63	395.50	593.25	791.00	1,186.50	1,582.00	1,977.50	2,768.50	3,955.00	7,910.00
NICs	19.90	24.78	34.67	40.62	40.62	40.62	40.62	40.62	40.62	40.62	40.62
Income tax	21.92	45.65	69.38	121.71	200.81	359.01	517.21	675.41	991.81	1,466.41	3,048.41
VAT		16.72	22.84	35.92							
Other indirect taxes		25.07	29.78	39.85							
Total excluding council tax		112.22	156.67	238.10							
Council tax		10.15	10.90	12.51							
Real take-home pay (1996–97 prices)	160.94	226.19	291.45	430.92	549.57	786.87	1,024.87	1,261.47	1,736.07	2,447.97	4,820.97
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	7.5	8.4	8.8	6.8	5.1	3.4	2.6	2.1	1.5	1.0	0.5
Income tax	11.1	15.4	17.5	20.5	25.4	30.3	32.7	34.2	35.8	37.1	38.5
VAT		5.6	5.8	6.1							
Other indirect taxes		8.5	7.5	6.7							
Total excluding council tax		37.8	39.6	40.1							
Council tax		3.4	2.8	2.1							
Married couple, one earner: 2 children											
£ per week											
Gross income	197.75	296.63	395.50	593.25	791.00	1,186.50	1,582.00	1,977.50	2,768.50	3,955.00	7,910.00
NICs	14.90	24.78	34.67	40.62	40.62	40.62	40.62	40.62	40.62	40.62	40.62
Income tax (less child benefit)	2.32	26.05	49.78	102.11	181.21	339.41	497.61	655.81	972.21	1,446.81	3,028.81
VAT		16.70	22.23	34.07							
Other indirect taxes		29.53	33.00	40.42							

Income tax, national insurance and indirect taxes at multiples of average earnings 1996–97 — *Percentage of male average earnings*

	50	*75*	*100*	*150*	*200*	*300*	*400*	*500*	*700*	*1000*	*2000*
Total excluding council tax		97.06	139.68	217.22							
Council tax		9.47	10.00	11.14							
Real take-home pay (1996–97 prices)	180.54	245.79	311.05	450.52	569.17	806.47	1,043.77	1,281.07	1,755.67	2,467.57	4,840.57
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	7.5	8.4	8.8	6.8	5.1	3.4	2.6	2.1	1.5	1.0	0.5
Income tax (less child benefit)	1.2	8.8	12.6	17.2	22.9	28.6	31.5	33.2	35.1	36.6	38.3
VAT		5.6	5.6	5.7							
Other indirect taxes		10.0	8.3	6.8							
Total excluding council tax		32.7	35.3	36.6							
Council tax		32.2	2.5	1.9							
Married couple, 2 earners, no children: Earnings split 60:40											
£ per week											
Gross income	197.75	296.63	395.50	593.25	791.00	1,186.50	1,582.00	1,977.50	2,768.50	3,955.00	7,910.00
NICs	10.02	19.90	29.79	49.57	67.38	81.24	81.24	81.24	81.24	81.24	81.24
Income tax	5.42	26.42	49.00	96.46	143.92	262.70	406.79	564.99	881.39	1,355.99	2,937.99
VAT		18.07	24.20	36.26							
Other indirect taxes		28.94	34.98	46.86							
Total excluding council tax		93.34	137.98	229.15							
Council tax		10.42	10.63	11.03							
Real take-home pay (1996–96 prices)	182.31	250.30	317.71	447.22	579.70	842.56	1,093.97	1,331.27	1,805.87	2,517.77	4,890.77
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	5.1	6.7	7.5	8.4	8.5	6.8	5.1	4.1	2.9	2.1	1.0
Income tax	2.7	8.9	12.4	16.3	18.2	22.1	25.7	28.6	31.8	34.3	37.1
VAT		6.1	6.1	6.1							
Other indirect taxes		9.8	8.8	7.9							
Total excluding council tax		31.5	34.9	38.6							
Council tax		3.5	2.7	1.9							

Income tax, national insurance and indirect taxes at multiples of average earnings 1997–98 — *Percentage of male average earnings*

	50	*75*	*100*	*150*	*200*	*300*	*400*	*500*	*700*	*1,000*	*2,000*
Single person											
£ per week											
Gross income	205.65	308.48	411.30	616.95	822.60	1,233.90	1,645.20	2,056.50	2,879.10	4,113.00	8,226.00
NICs	15.61	25.89	36.17	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54
Income tax	27.04	50.69	74.34	127.97	210.23	374.75	539.27	703.49	1,032.83	1,526.39	3,171.59
VAT		17.19	23.01	35.39							
Other indirect taxes		25.09	32.07	46.93							
Total excluding council tax		118.86	165.59	251.83							
Real take-home pay (1996–97 prices)	156.06	226.29	293.51	436.61	557.02	797.83	1,038.64	1,279.45	1,761.07	2,483.51	4,891.61
Increase since 1991–92	13.66	19.25	24.84	34.13	38.04	54.73	71.42	88.11	121.49	171.56	338.46
Increase since 1996–97	3.29	5.26	7.22	10.86	12.62	16.13	19.64	23.15	30.17	40.71	75.81
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	7.6	8.4	8.8	6.7	5.0	3.4	2.5	2.0	1.4	1.0	0.5
Income tax	13.1	16.4	18.1	20.7	25.6	30.4	32.8	34.2	35.9	37.1	38.6
VAT		5.6	5.6	5.7							
Other indirect taxes		8.1	7.8	7.6							
Total excluding council tax		38.5	40.3	40.8							
Married couple, one earner: no children											
£ per week											
Gross income	205.65	308.48	411.30	616.95	822.60	1,233.90	1,645.20	2,056.50	2,879.00	4,113.00	8,226.00
NICs	15.61	25.89	36.17	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54
Income tax	21.76	45.41	69.06	122.69	204.95	369.47	533.99	698.51	1,027.55	1,521.11	3,166.31
VAT		17.47	23.94	37.71							
Other indirect taxes		27.10	32.20	43.06							
Total excluding council tax		115.87	161.37	245.01							
Real take-home pay (1996–97 prices)	164.21	231.44	298.66	441.77	562.17	802.98	1,043.79	1,284.60	1,766.23	2,488.66	4,896.77
Increase since 1991–92	9.41	15.01	20.59	29.90	28.15	44.84	61.53	78.22	111.61	161.68	328.59

Income tax, national insurance and indirect taxes at multiples of average earnings 1997–98 — *Percentage of male average earnings*

	50	*75*	*100*	*150*	*200*	*300*	*400*	*500*	*700*	*1,000*	*2,000*
Increase since 1996–97	3.27	5.25	7.21	10.85	12.60	16.11	19.62	23.13	30.16	40.69	75.80
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	7.6	8.4	8.8	6.7	5.0	3.4	2.5	2.0	1.4	1.0	0.5
Income tax	10.6	14.7	16.8	19.9	24.9	29.9	32.5	34.0	35.7	37.0	38.5
VAT		5.7	5.8	6.1							
Other indirect taxes		8.8	7.8	7.0							
Total excluding council tax		37.6	39.2	39.7							
Married couple one earner: 2 children											
£ per week											
Gross income	205.65	308.48	411.30	616.95	822.60	1,233.90	1,645.20	2,056.50	2,879.10	4,113.00	8,226.00
NICs	15.61	25.89	36.17	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54	41.54
Income tax (less child benefit)	1.71	25.36	49.01	102.64	184.90	349.42	513.94	678.46	1,007.50	1,501.06	3,146.26
VAT		17.41	23.26	35.72							
Other indirect taxes		31.92	35.73	43.84							
Total excluding council tax		100.58	144.17	223.75							
Real take-home pay (1996–97 prices)	183.78	251.00	318.23	461.33	581.74	822.55	1,063.36	1,304.17	1,785.79	2,508.22	4,916.33
Increase since 1991–92	10.65	16.24	21.83	31.13	29.40	46.09	62.78	79.47	112.85	162.91	329,82
Increase since 1996–97	3.24	5.21	7.18	10.81	12.57	16.08	19.59	23.10	30.12	40.65	75.76
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	7.6	8.4	8.8	6.7	5.0	3.4	2.5	2.0	1.4	1.0	0.5
Income tax (less child benefit)	0.8	8.2	11.9	16.6	22.5	28.3	31.2	33.0	35.0	36.5	38.2
VAT		5.6	5.7	5.8							
Other indirect taxes		10.3	8.7	7.1							
Total excluding council tax		32.6	35.1	36.3							
Married couple, 2 earners, no children: Earnings split 60:-40											
£ per week											
Gross income	205.65	308.48	411.30	616.95	822.60	1,233.90	1,645.20	2,056.50	2,879.10	4,113.00	8,226.00
NICs	10.65	20.93	31.21	51.78	69.48	83.08	83.08	83.08	83.08	83.08	83.08
Income tax	4.74	26.15	48.81	96.11	143.41	265.31	415.19	579.71	908.75	1,402.31	3,047.51
VAT		18.78	25.24	37.99							
Other indirect taxes		31.06	37.64	50.62							
Total excluding council tax		96.92	142.90	236.49							
Real take-home pay (1996–97 prices)	185.67	255.07	323.27	457.72	594.96	864.09	1,119.19	1,360.00	1,841.62	2,564.06	4,972.16
Increase since 1991–92	8.73	16.50	23.06	34.25	47.77	56.46	66.19	82.88	116.26	166.34	333.23
Increase since 1996–97	3.36	4.77	6.56	10.50	15.26	21.53	25.22	28.73	35.75	46.29	81.39
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	5.2	6.8	7.6	8.4	8.4	6.7	5.0	4.0	2.9	2.0	1.0
Income tax	2.3	8.5	11.9	15.6	17.4	21.5	25.2	28.2	31.6	34.1	37.0
VAT		6.1	6.1	6.2							
Other indirect taxes		10.1	9.2	8.2							
Total excluding council tax		31.4	34.7	38.3							

Income tax, national insurance and indirect taxes at multiples of average earnings — *1991–92 indexed to 1997–98*

	Percentage of male average earnings										
	50	*75*	*100*	*150*	*200*	*300*	*400*	*500*	*700*	*100*	*2000*
Single person											
£ per week											
Gross income	205.65	308.48	411.30	616.95	822.60	1233.90	1645.20	2056.50	2879.10	4113.00	8226.00
NICs	14.17	23.42	32.68	37.51	37.51	37.51	37.51	37.51	37.51	37.51	37.51
Income tax	32.64	58.34	84.05	135.68	217.94	382.46	546.98	711.50	1040.54	1534.10	3179.30
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	6.9	7.6	7.9	6.1	4.6	3.0	2.3	1.8	1.3	0.9	0.5
Income tax	15.9	18.9	20.4	22.0	26.5	31.0	33.2	34.6	36.1	37.3	38.6
Married couple, one earner: no children											
£ per week											
Gross income	205.65	308.45	411.30	616.95	822.60	1233.90	1645.20	2056.50	2879.10	4113.00	8226.00
NICs	14.17	23.42	32.68	37.51	37.51	37.51	37.51	37.51	37.51	37.51	37.51
Income tax	22.83	48.54	74.24	125.66	202.25	366.77	531.29	695.81	1024.85	1518.41	3163.61

Income tax, national insurance and indirect taxes at multiples of average earnings *1991–92 indexed to 1997–98*

	Percentage of male average earnings										
	50	*75*	*100*	*150*	*200*	*300*	*400*	*500*	*700*	*100*	*2000*
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	6.9	7.6	7.9	6.1	4.6	3.0	2.3	1.8	1.3	0.9	0.5
Income tax	11.1	15.7	18.1	20.4	24.6	29.7	32.3	33.8	35.6	36.9	38.5
Married couple, one earner: 2 children											
£ per week											
Gross income	205.65	308.48	411.30	616.95	822.60	1233.90	1645.20	2056.30	2879.10	4113.00	8226.00
NICs	14.17	23.42	32.68	37.51	37.51	37.51	37.51	37.51	37.51	37.51	37.51
Income tax (less child benefit)	2.78	28.49	54.19	105.61	182.20	346.72	511.24	675.76	1004.80	1498.36	3143.56
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	6.9	7.6	7.9	6.1	4.6	3.0	2.3	1.8	1.3	0.9	0.5
Income tax (less child benefit)	1.4	9.2	13.2	17.1	22.1	28.1	31.1	32.9	34.9	36.4	38.2
Married couple, 2 earners, no children: Earnings split 60:40											
£ per week											
Gross income	205.65	308.48	411.30	616.95	822.60	1233.90	1645.20	2056.50	2879.10	4113.00	8226.00
NICs	9.83	19.08	28.34	46.85	62.78	75.02	75.02	75.02	75.02	75.02	75.02
Income tax	4.06	29.76	55.47	106.88	158.29	273.96	420.20	584.72	913.76	1407.32	3052.52
Percentage of earnings											
NICs	4.8	6.2	6.9	7.6	7.6	6.1	4.6	3.6	2.6	1.8	0.9
Income tax	2.0	9.6	13.5	17.3	19.2	22.2	25.5	28.4	31.7	34.2	37.1

Notes to Tables:

1. Income tax payments are calculated on the assumption that the households receive no tax reliefs other than the standard allowances and only have income from employment. All earner, including wives are assumed to pay Class 1 National Insurance contributions at the contracted-in rate. Child benefit is deducted from income tax so as to provide comparability with figures for earlier years when support was partly given through child tax allowances.
2. Earnings are taken to be the average gross weekly earnings of all full-time males on adult rates with pay unaffected by absence. Estimates of earnings in 1996–97 and 1997–98 are based on earnings growth assumptions of 3¼ per cent. in 1996–97 and 4 per cent. in 1997–98 on line with the illustrative assumptions set out in the Financial Statement and Budget Report.
3. The figures for an indexed 1991–92 tax system show the tax payments that would result if the 1991–92 income tax system had been indexed to 1997–98 using the increase in the Retail Prices Index between December 1990 and September 1996, and income tax and national insurance contributions rates had been kept at their 1991–92 levels.
4. Real take-home pay includes earnings and child benefit less direct tax payments (income tax and national insurance contributions) deflated to 1996–97 prices using the Retail Prices Index. Indirect taxes and council tax are included in the Retail Prices Index and therefore in the inflation adjustment. Those on low earnings may be entitled to income-related benefits not included in these calculations.
5. Figures for indirect taxes include estimates of the effects of the main intermediate taxes on households as well as the impact of taxes on final goods and services. Estimates of the impact of taxes on final goods and services assume that these taxes are fully incident on households. Estimates of the impact of intermediate taxes are based on the relation between intermediate production costs and final consumption derived using input-output techniques.
6. Figures for indirect taxes and council tax are estimated from expenditure patterns in the 1994–95 Family Expenditure Survey uprated to later years using forecasts of aggregate tax receipts. All estimates are based on the illustrative assumption that 10 per cent. of disposable income is saved.
7. Estimates of indirect taxes are very approximate, even within the range for which figures are shown, because spending patterns vary widely between households with the same composition and income. The margin of error is even higher outside the range shown, and even illustrative estimates cannot be made. Because of sampling variation, there can be substantial differences between estimates obtained from Family Expenditure Surveys for different years, so reliable comparisons cannot be made between the estimates for different years.

Beer Taxes

Mr. Meale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was *(a)* the level of tax on beer in each year since 1979 and *(b)* the percentage change between each year. [7254]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 3 December 1996]:* Tax revenues—excise duty and VAT—for a pint of bitter in licensed premises were as follows:

	Tax in pence	*Percentage change*
1979	12.2	23.1
1980	14.8	21.7
1981	19.3	29.7
1982	21.7	12.9
1983	23.1	6.1
1984	26.2	13.6
1985	28.3	8.0
1986	28.8	1.8
1987	29.2	1.4
1988	30.8	5.4
1989	31.6	2.5
1990	34.5	9.3
1991	40.6	17.8
1992	43.1	6.0
1993	45.2	4.9
1994	44.5	–1.5
1995	46.2	3.9
1996	46.9	1.6

For 1979, price relates to July. For 1980 to 1993 prices relate to April/May and from 1994 onwards they relate to January.

Tax on a pint of bitter in licensed premises is now the lowest proportion of the selling price in 30 years.

European Union Budget

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the net EU budget contributions for each member state in 1995 and their estimated contributions in 1996, indicating the sources of his figures. [7677]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 5 December 1996]:* The table sets out indicative figures for 1995. These are drawn from the European Court of Auditors' information on member states' total financial contributions to and receipts from the Community budget published this November in the "Annual Report covering the financial year 1995". The net contribution figures show the balance from the two sides of the budget by deducting total receipts from the gross contribution for each member state. A minus sign therefore indicates that a member state received more from the budget in 1995 than it paid.

Comparable information from the European Court of Auditors relating to 1996 will not be available until November 1997. The figure for the UK's net contribution for 1996 is therefore the Treasury's most recent forecast. This calculation is not directly comparable with that of the European Court of Auditors, but the Government are confident that the UK's net contribution in 1996 will be considerably lower than in 1995 as we recover excess payments relating to the 1995 underspend.

Net contributions to the EU Budget in 1995

	Millions of ecu	*£ million*
Belgium	311	255
Denmark	–306	–251
Germany	13,431	10,999
Greece	–3,489	–2,857
Spain	–7,218	–5,911
France	1,727	1,414
Ireland	–1,887	–1,545
Italy	614	503
Luxembourg	45	37
Netherlands	2,005	1,642
Austria	905	741
Portugal	–2,381	–1,950
Finland	165	135
Sweden	937	767
UK (1995)	4,720	3,865
UK (1996)	1,892	1,603

Notes:

1. These figures are net of the UK's abatement.
2. Exchange rates used are 1.2211 ecu/£ for 1995 and 1.1803 ecu/£ for 1996.
3. These figures can only be indicative of net contributions because the Court of Auditors does not allocate all Community spending by member state. In particular, administrative spending is not fully attributed.
4. Net contributions can vary significantly from year to year owing to adjustments in Own Resource payments and fluctuations in receipts. The UK's net contribution in 1995 was high because the Community Budget underspent in that year, leading to lower UK receipts than expected. The UK abatement in 1995 was also relatively lower than on average.

Source:

European Court of Auditors (UK 1996 figure HM Treasury, Cm 3350)

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much his Department will spend on Christmas trees and decorations this year; how many Christmas trees will be bought for his Department's headquarters; and what are the type and country of origin of the trees. [7572]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* Two Christmas trees of type Nordmanianna, grown in England, have been purchased at a cost of around £500.

Economic Statistics

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his answer of 9 June 1995, *Official Report*, columns *339–40*, on economic statistics relating to exports, investments, imports and gross domestic product of EU and G7 countries, to cover the period 1979 to 1995. [7820]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* G7 and EC growth, investment, exports and imports data can be found in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development publications "OECD Quarterly National Accounts" and the "OECD National Accounts, Vol. I", which are available in the House of Commons Library.

	Average annual export volume growth 1979–95 Percentage	*Average annual GDP growth 1979–95 Percentage*
G7		
US	6.1	2.4
Canada	6.3	2.4
Japan	5.6	3.1
France	3.9	1.9
Italy	4.5	2.0
UK	3.6	1.9
West Germany	5.3	2.1
Rest of EC		
Austria	4.4	2.2
Belgium[1]	4.2	1.9
Denmark	4.5	1.9
Finland	4.3	2.0
Greece[1]	5.7	1.4
Ireland[1]	8.8	3.6
Luxembourg[1]	3.9	3.0
Netherlands	4.2	1.9
Portugal[1]	6.2	2.5
Spain	6.7	2.4
Sweden	4.6	1.4

[1] Latest available year 1994.

	Investment to GDP average ratio 1979–95	*Imports to GDP average ratio 1979–95*
G7		
US	18.5	10.6
Canada	20.6	26.7
Japan	29.4	10.0
France	20.3	21.9
Italy	20.3	20.6
UK	17.1	26.3
West Germany[1]	22.7	30.2
Rest of EC		
Austria	24.1	37.7
Belgium[1]	18.1	69.6
Denmark	17.4	32.0
Finland	22.7	27.9

	Investment to GDP average ratio 1979–95	*Imports to GDP average ratio 1979–95*
Greece[1]	22.0	26.8
Ireland[1]	20.7	57.3
Luxembourg[1]	22.1	91.8
Netherlands	20.1	49.4
Portugal[1]	28.1	37.2
Spain	21.4	20.1
Sweden	18.4	30.9

[1] Latest available year 1994.

Household Incomes

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average gross weekly income in 1995–96 by decile group for *(a)* all households, *(b)* one adult retired households mainly dependent on state pensions, *(c)* one adult retired households not mainly dependent on state pensions, *(d)* one adult non-retired households, *(e)* one adult households with children, *(f)* two adult households with children, *(g)* one man, one woman non-retired households, *(h)* one man, one woman retired households mainly dependent on state pensions and (i) one man, one woman retired households not mainly dependent on state pensions. [7826]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 11 December 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the average gross weekly income in 1995–96 by decile group for certain household compositions.

Estimates from the Family Expenditure Survey (FES) for average gross normal weekly income in 1995–96 by decile group for these household compositions are shown in the attached table. The figures are subject to sampling variations; have been rounded to the nearest 10 pence; are averages for each household composition and have not been adjusted to reflect household composition.

Family Expenditure Survey 1995–96
Average Gross Normal Weekly Income by Decile Group

	Lowest ten per cent.	*Second decile group*	*Third decile group*	*Fourth decile group*	*Fifth decile group*	*Sixth decile group*	*Seventh decile group*	*Eighth decile group*	*Ninth decile group*	*Highest ten per cent.*	*All households*
All households											
Number of households	680	679	680	680	680	679	680	680	679	680	797
Average gross normal weekly income (£)	65.30	102.00	145.20	201.20	270.90	342.80	417.40	514.20	659.40	1090.50	380.90
One adult retired households mainly dependent on state pensions											
Number of households	51	51	50	51	51	51	51	50	51	51	508
Average gross normal weekly income (£)	61.20	65.60	67.70	70.60	72.30	75.30	82.40	92.80	110.30	146.00	84.40
One adult retired households not mainly dependent on state pensions											
Number of households	42	42	41	42	42	42	42	41	42	42	418
Average gross normal weekly income (£)	83.40	99.60	113.70	125.20	136.80	152.80	176.30	209.70	270.30	528.30	189.70
One adult non-retired households											
Number of households	90	89	90	89	90	89	90	89	90	89	895
Average gross normal weekly income (£)	44.40	67.70	103.80	156.80	201.80	247.00	292.90	343.70	422.10	640.50	251.80
One adult households with children											
Number of households	44	44	44	44	45	44	44	44	44	44	441
Average gross normal weekly income (£)	63.10	77.80	84.80	93.50	105.80	122.00	156.50	211.30	279.90	493.30	168.70
Two adult households with children											
Number of household	166	167	166	167	166	166	167	166	167	166	1,664
Average gross normal weekly income (£)	117.80	210.70	294.40	356.00	405.80	459.00	531.90	625.40	757.20	1,187.10	494.50
One man one woman non-retired households											
Number of households	134	134	134	134	134	133	134	134	134	134	1,339
Average gross normal weekly income (£)	113.80	202.60	276.90	337.90	390.50	449.90	517.30	614.10	748.60	1,283.10	493.50
One man one woman retired households mainly dependent on state pensions											
Number of households	24	24	23	24	24	24	24	23	24	24	238
Average gross normal weekly income (£)	90.00	106.50	111.90	119.30	125.70	133.50	144.90	160.20	177.10	230.40	140.00
One man one woman retired households not mainly dependent on state pensions											
Number of households	44	44	44	44	44	43	44	44	44	44	439
Average gross normal weekly income (£)	141.20	168.70	189.50	213.70	238.10	269.60	309.50	364.00	449.00	780.90	312.50

Note:

ONS, Family Spending 1995–96, Crown copyright 1996.

Budget Effects

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish his Department's estimates of the distributional impact of changes made in the Budget *(a)* by household income decile and *(b)* by region. [7267]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* Estimates of the impact of some of the main Budget tax measures on household income deciles are in the table. Estimates of the effects of other Budget measures and of the distributional impact by region are not available.

The figures show the direct impact of the measures on households. They do not allow for the lasting prosperity, combining steady growth with low inflation, that has been secured by the Budget and is ensuring that living standards go on rising. A family on average earnings should be £370 better off next year than this, after earnings growth, tax and inflation, and over £1,100 a year better off than in 1991–92.

Average impact (– loss/+ gain) of main Budget tax measures in 1997–98[1] (as a percentage of net income)

Household income decile[2]	*Tobacco*	*Other measures*
Bottom	–0.3	–0.2
2nd	–0.2	0.0
3rd	–0.2	0.1
4th	–0.2	0.3
5th	–0.1	0.4
6th	–0.1	0.6
7th	–0.1	0.7
8th	–0.1	0.7
9th	–0.1	0.8
Top	0.0	0.8

[1] Estimates based on 1992–93 to 1994–95 Family Expenditure Survey data, uprated to 1997–98 price and earnings levels. Because of the limitations of the Survey data the estimates are only approximate, particularly at the top and bottom of the distribution. The figures include the main tax measures directly affecting households—real rises of £200 in personal allowances; real rise of £100 in lower rate band; 1p reduction in the basic rate of income tax; freeze on beer, wine and cider duties; 4 per cent. cut in spirits duty; 5 per cent. real rise in tobacco duty; 3 per cent. real rise in road fuel duties and the increase in insurance premium tax of 1.5 per cent. The figures show the effects relative to indexed tax allowances and duty rates.

[2] Household incomes are adjusted for differences in composition before allocating households to deciles.

Tax Evasion

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases of evasions of payments of *(a)* income tax and *(b)* other tax have been discovered in each of the last five years; and what has been the value of the revenue recovered in each category. [8306]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the written answer which I gave him on 26 October 1995, *Official Report*, columns *727–28*, which covered the years 1989–90 to 1994–95.

The equivalent figures for 1995–96 are:

Income tax investigations	*Other investigations*	*Yield from counter-evasion work (£ million)*
57,211	9,106	1,309

Splitting the yield figures for each of the last five years between income tax and other taxes could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Tax (Tobacco Products)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many representations he has received from members of the public calling for *(a)* maintaining present and *(b)* reducting rates of tax on tobacco products (i) since November 1995 and (ii) since September 1996; [6898]

(2) how many representations he has received from hon. Members calling for *(a)* maintaining present and *(b)* reducting rates of tax on tobacco products since November 1995. [6920]

Mr. Oppenheim: The precise information is not available, but the Prime Minister and Treasury Ministers have received many representations, in varying forms, from hon. Members, members of the public and health practitioners on many aspects of tobacco taxation. The Chancellor met hon. Members on 29 October, as did I on 30 October, to hear further representations on the subject of tobacco taxation.

Airport Passenger Taxes

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the level of airport passenger taxes, where appropriate, in each of the OECD member states. [7450]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is not available in the form requested because the structure of air passenger taxes throughout OECD member states is very varied and complex. It includes embarkation taxes, departure charges, passenger service charges and air transport taxes as well as VAT-type taxes. They also vary, within a single state, according to factors such as airport of departure, place of destination, ticket price and weight of aircraft.

Prawns

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the verdict of the European Court on the duty liability of John and Celia Smith of Grimsby on prawns imported from the Faroe Islands with valid EUR 1 certificates, if he proposes to apply to the European Commission for a waiver on the duty. [7684]

Mr. Oppenheim: The European Court of Justice has referred this matter back to the United Kingdom High Court for a decision as to duty liability. The judgment specifically stated that it is now for the national court to determine whether the conditions for waiver are met. It is the High Court which will decide this case, not the European Commission.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what amount of retrospective duty was levied on German and Danish importers of prawns subsequently imported with valid EUR 1 certificates from Iceland and the Faroe Islands; and how many importers were affected. [7682]

Mr. Oppenheim: We have no information on amounts of duty demanded retrospectively in Germany and Denmark, or on the number of importers affected. However UK customs is aware that demands have been

issued in both countries and, as in the United Kingdom, appeals are working their way through the respectively legal systems.

Zaire

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the allegations contained in the Cook report of June 1995 relating to arms transport to Zaire, a transcript of which has been sent to him. [7525]

Mr. Oppenheim: The investigation and prosecution of any alleged breaches of UK legislation implementing arms embargoes is a matter for the commissioners of Customs and Excise. It is not customs' general practice to comment publicly about the existence or nature of any investigation of individuals or companies not yet accused of criminal offences since to do so could risk prejudicing any on-going inquiries or future criminal proceedings.

I am, however, on this occasion able to tell the hon. Member that the allegations contained in the Cook report were taken into account in inquiries made by customs in 1995. These inquiries did not produce evidence to support any criminal proceedings.

British Artists (Germany)

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is his policy that British artists appearing in Germany should be able to recover or obtain credit for value added tax imposed in Germany on taxes withheld. [7660]

Mr. Oppenheim: When UK artists appear in Germany an element for VAT is included in the calculation of taxes withheld there. A deduction in respect of that element may be made by UK artists in computing their income for the purposes of UK income tax.

Petrol and Diesel

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of total income to the Treasury resulting from an increase in petrol and diesel duties exclusive of value added tax of *(a)* 1p per litre, *(b)* 3p per litre and *(c)* 4.5p per litre. [7479]

Mr. Oppenheim: Based on information in the "Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs," increasing the duty rate on petrol and diesel by 1p, 3p and 4.5p per litre would yield approximately £0.5 billion, £1.4 billion and £2.1 billion respectively in the first full year. Costings take account of the effects on behaviour where they are likely to have a significant effect on the yield and any consequential changes in receipts from related taxes including VAT; and they are measured against a non-indexed base.

National Insurance

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each source of taxation revenue and for national insurance, (i) the amounts received and what percentage that is of total revenue and (ii) the numbers of people paying in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 1995. [3044]

Mr. Jack *[pursuant to his reply, 9 December 1996, c. 27–28]:* There was a transcription error in the tables. I apologise for this mistake. The correct figures are given in the following tables.

Information on the amounts of tax received is in table 1. Figures for the numbers of people paying income tax, corporation tax, capital gains tax and inheritance tax are in table 2. Information on the numbers of people paying other taxes is not available.

Table 1: Tax and National Insurance Receipts (on a cash basis)
£ billion

	1980–81	*1985–86*	*1990–91*	*1995–96*
Income tax	24.3	35.4	55.3	68.0
Corporation tax	4.6	10.7	21.5	23.6
Value added tax	11.0	19.3	31.0	43.1
Excise duties[1]	8.9	14.9	19.9	28.4
Other taxes and royalties[2]	22.6	41.3	40.7	44.2
Social security contributions	14.1	24.5	35.4	44.5
Total	85.4	146.0	203.8	251.8
As a percentage of total				
Income tax	28.4	24.2	27.1	27.0
Corporation tax	5.4	7.3	10.5	9.4
Value added tax	12.8	13.2	15.2	17.1
Excise duties[1]	10.4	10.2	9.8	11.3
Other taxes and royalties[2]	26.4	28.3	20.0	17.6
National insurance contributions	16.5	16.8	17.4	17.7
Total	100	100	100	100

[1] Fuel, alcohol and tobacco duties.
[2] Includes local taxes as well as other central government taxes.
Source:
Office for National Statistics.

Table 2: Taxpayer numbers (thousands)

	1980–81	*1985–86*	*1990–91*	*1995–96*
Income tax[1]	24,900	23,700	26,100	25,700
Corporation tax[2]	195	275	350	450
Capital gains tax	155	130	110	85
Inheritance tax				
transfers on death	21	27	21	22
lifetime transfers	5	10	7	3

[1] Husbands and wives are counted separately.
[2] Taxpayers are companies.
Source:
Inland Revenue.

Private Finance Initiative (Universities)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many universities have made use of the private finance initiative to date; and what is the total expenditure involved. [8425]

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England has an active programme for seeking private finance initiative "pathfinder" projects which can be used as exemplars of good practice for the sector as a whole. So far, 12 institutions have been awarded this status and are progressing projects to a capital value of some £120 million. The funding council has recently closed

round two of its "pathfinder" programme, and we expect announcements regarding additional successful projects early in the new year.

Universities are autonomous institutions and make their own procurement decisions. It is therefore impossible to know the exact number of institutions which have procurement arrangements involving private finance. The Higher Education Funding Council for England estimates that total commercial funding in the sector to date exceeds £1.6 billion.

ENVIRONMENT

Departmental Staff (Local Government)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many personnel in his Department work full time on local government matters; at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [7773]

Sir Paul Beresford: In the Department of the Environment, approximately 222 staff work full time on local government matters at a total administration cost of approximately £8.5 million.

Leader Project

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the Leader project; how much funding from European Community resources is available for the United Kingdom, and in which financial years; to what extent matching funding from Her Majesty's Government are required; and which areas of England qualified to receive Leader funding. [8066]

Sir Paul Beresford: The purpose of the Leader II initiative is to permit those engaged in the rural economy to implement measures which will help develop their own potential within an overall policy for stimulating rural development.

The United Kingdom has been allocated £62.64 million up to the end of 1999. Leader II will pay up to 50 per cent. of the eligible costs of a project. The remaining match funding must be found by the applicant, and may come from the Government and other public and private sector sources. The initiative is targeted at objective 5b areas and those eligible in England are parts of the northern uplands, midlands uplands, Lincolnshire, East Anglia, the south-west and the west midlands marches.

Stockton City Challenge

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what decision he has reached on the application by Stockton city challenge to redevelop the north end of Stockton high street. [8069]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Secretary of State received the report of the inspector who conducted the public inquiry on 3 June 1996, and is considering it. Following receipt of the report, he was asked to reopen the public inquiry by one of the non-statutory objectors to the compulsory purchase order, and this required some further consultation with the parties involved in the inquiry. Those consultations are now complete and are also being considered. The decision will be issued as soon as it is practicable to do so.

Rooms over Shops

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress with the Government's scheme to encourage shopkeepers to use rooms over the shop for private tenancies; what financial incentives are available; and how many units are estimated to have become available since the scheme began. [8067]

Mr. Clappison: My Department ran a demonstration flats over shops programme providing £25 million between 1992–93 and 1994–95 to bring empty space above retail premises into residential use. This created some 1,500 additional housing units directly and many more indirectly. Capital funding for such schemes has continued under the Government's housing partnership fund which provided £30 million a year in 1995–96 and 1996–97 for innovative housing projects including the provision of flats over shops. We will be publishing a research report by the South Bank university early in the new year which evaluates the flats over shops programme and other similar initiatives.

Battersea Power Station

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the London borough of Wandsworth last forwarded a report to his Department on the overall condition of *(a)* the structure and *(b)* the site of Battersea power station; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library. [8515]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have received no such reports. The building is regularly inspected by English Heritage. The last such inspection was on 5 December.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the state of the internal structure of Battersea power station. [8637]

Sir Paul Beresford: No. The building is regularly inspected by English Heritage. The last such inspection was on 5 December and is a matter for the Secretary of State for National Heritage.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when officials from his Department last visited the site of Battersea power station; what reports were published on their visit; and where such reports can be obtained. [8638]

Sir Paul Beresford: Officials visited Battersea power station on 3 December for a presentation of the proposals to redevelop the site. No reports have been published.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the acreage of the site of Battersea power station. [8514]

Sir Paul Beresford: I understand that the site is some 30 acres—12 hectares.

New Housing (Access)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department has

commissioned on the additional building costs involved in extending part M of the Building Regulations to improve access to new housing; who will be consulted in the course of that research; and when he expects it to be completed. [8293]

Mr. Clappison: My Department has not yet commissioned any such research, but we have agreed to undertake a joint study with the House-Builders Federation on the additional building costs involved in extending part M of the Building Regulations to improve access to new housing. To this end, officials have written to eight local authorities to ask for their help in selecting suitable schemes for the study. Once all the authorities have replied, the Department will be in a position to commission the research and establish a date for its completion.

Local Government Finance

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the (i) total standard spending assessment and police grant and (ii) total external support including revenue support grant, non-domestic rates, SSA reduction grant and police grants to be received by *(a)* all local authorities, *(b)* each class of local authority, *(c)* education authorities, *(d)* authorities other than police authorities and *(e)* all authorities, in (1) 1997–98 and (2) 1996–97 and for each the change over 1996–97 in pounds and percentages, adjusting 1996–97 amounts for local government reorganisation and for changed local authority functions and responsibilities, and the further transfer for responsibilities for care in the community from central Government budgets in 1997–98; and if he will list each such adjustment and its monetary value; [8002]

(2) what is the (i) total standard spending and (ii) total aggregate external finance for *(a)* all local authorities and *(b)* all local authorities other than police authorities in England in 1997–98 and 1996–97, and for each the change over 1996–97 in pounds and percentages, adjusting 1996–97 totals for changed local authority functions and responsibilities, and the further transfer for responsibilities for care in the community from central Government budgets in 1997–98; and if he will list each such adjustment and its monetary value. [8003]

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* I have placed the information requested in the Library.

Ms Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is (i) the total standard spending and (ii) the total aggregate external finance for *(a)* all local authorities and *(b)* all education authorities in England in (1) 1997–98 and (2) 1996–97; and in each case what was the change over 1996–97 in pounds and percentages, adjusting 1996–97 totals for changed local authority functions and responsibilities in 1997–98, and the further transfer of responsibilities for care in the community from central Government budgets in 1997–98; [8564]

(2) what are (i) the total standard spending assessments and police grant external support and (ii) the total external support to be received by *(a)* all local authorities, *(b)* each class of authority, *(c)* education authorities, *(d)* all authorities other than policy authorities and *(e)* all authorities, in (1) 1997–98 and (2) 1996–97; and in each case what was the change over 1996–97 in pounds and percentages, adjusting 1996–97 amounts for local government reorganisation and for changed local authority functions and responsibilities in 1997–98. [8565]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier. The remaining information is contained in the table.

Table 1: Total Standard Spending and Aggregate External Finance for Education Authorities

	Adjusted 1996–97 (£ million)	*Provisional 1997–98 (£ million)*	*Change (£ million)*	*Change Percentage*
Total Standard Spending for Education Authorities	35,198.8	36,011.4	812.6	2.3
Total Standard Spending for Education Authorities (adjusted for 1997–98 Community Care STG)	35,517.5	36,011.4	494.0	1.4
Aggregate External Finance for Education Authorities	27,426.3	27,879.8	453.5	1.7
Aggregate External Finance for Education Authorities (adjusted for 1997–98 Community Care STG)	27,745.0	27,879.8	134.90.5	

Notes:

1. The aggregates for TSS and AEF presented in the table include only those types of specific and special grants which are allocated solely to education authorities (whether or not the grant relates to education). Some £150 million of further specific grants are allocated both to some Education Authorities and to other classes of authority. These are housing benefit administration grant, council tax benefit administration grant, national parks grant and part of the ethnic minorities (s11) grant.

2. The figures for adjusted TSS and AEF are derived from information about standard spending assessments for education authorities and total external support for education authorities set out in tables 3 and 4 of the information provided in the answer referred to above. The notes to those tables provide details of the derivation of the figures.

3. All figures for TSS and AEF exclude 1997–98 reorganisation SCAs. They also exclude funding for specified bodies, the city offset and reorganisation: transitional reduction grant.

Access to Information

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to publish his reply to the first report of the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities on freedom of access to information on the environment, HL9; and if he will make a statement. [8465]

Mr. Clappison: The recommendations in the report are being carefully considered. The Government's reply will be published in due course.

Genetically Modified Food

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will suspend imports of genetically modified maize until a full assessment has been made of the hazards to human health and a proper labelling regime is in place. [8129]

Mr. Clappison: In accordance with Council directive 90/220/EEC on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms, an assessment on the risks posed to human health and the environment for the genetically modified maize has been carried out by member states. It is now up to the European Commission to take a decision on the importation and marketing of the genetically modified maize. This decision will be in accordance with the provisions of the directive, which include provisions for labelling.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the ministerial group on energy efficiency last met; and if he will reconvene it. [8695]

Mr. Clappison: The work of the former ministerial group on energy efficiency has been continued by Green Ministers, who met most recently on 28 October 1996.

Coastal Byelaws

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the proposed discussion paper which reviews the byelaw-making powers for the coast. [8910]

Mr. Clappison: The Department of the Environment has today published "Byelaw Powers for the Coast: A Discussion Paper". The paper sets out the main issues regarding current scope and use of the relevant powers in England, ways in which present arrangements might be improved and updated, and the relationship with broader management aims and initiatives. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House, and the paper will be widely distributed.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of the UK round table on sustainable development. [9101]

Mr. Gummer: The round table was set up in January 1995 and is now approaching the end of its initial two-year term. The Government are encouraged by the progress that the round table has made during this period in developing its role as a body which can build consensus on priorities and actions to assist the UK's pursuit of sustainable development. The round table is providing an increasingly valuable and welcome contribution to the continuing debate about integrating economic development and environmental protection and enhancement. I am therefore pleased to announce that its life will be extended for a further two years until January 1999. I am considering, in consultation with my colleagues, what the round table's membership should be during that period, with a view to strengthening it in some areas.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Cameroons

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the major development projects in the Cameroons which have received a United Kingdom contribution. [8434]

Dr. Liam Fox: In the last decade we have funded the following major projects:

- In-service teacher education and training in the Anglophone provinces.
- Agricultural research.
- Forest management and regeneration.
- Community forestry development.
- Conservation and management of natural resources on Mount Cameroon.
- Rural development component of Korup national park conservation project.

The last three project are on-going.

World Bank (Environmental Impact Assessments)

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to request the World bank to undertake an environmental impact assessment before approving funds for major development projects. [8410]

Dr. Liam Fox: The World bank recently completed a report which took stock of the bank's progress in implementing its environmental assessment policy. We welcome the steps which the bank has taken to ensure that environmental concerns are properly reflected in its operations, and continue to press for further improvements.

Great Lakes Region

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the current humanitarian requirements of the Great Lakes region of Africa; and if he will make a statement. [8576]

Dr. Liam Fox: According to the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs on 2 December, £52 million had so far been pledged by donors in response to the UN inter-agency appeal for the Great Lakes region. This does not include a commitment of £129 million agreed by the European Union on 6 December. The appeal covered total estimated requirements for food aid up to June 1997 and certain other requirements up to January 1997 estimated altogether at £155 million. The Government of Rwanda have also revised their programme to reintegrate returning

refugees and re-establish productive communities. On 20 November, my noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development announced a commitment of £10 million to address immediate needs in the Great Lakes region.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the current security situation in the Great Lakes region of Africa; and if he will make a statement. [8575]

Dr. Fox: The region remains unstable and afflicted by violence. The security situation in Burundi is of particular concern. We continue to support regional efforts to resolve the underlying political problems, and welcome President Moi's intention to convene a further regional summit on Nairobi on 16 December. We also look forward to the report of the UN special envoy to Zaire and the Great Lakes, Ambassador Chretien.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to facilitate the holding of an international conference on peace, security and development in the Great Lakes region of Africa. [8579]

Dr. Fox: We are committed with our EU partners to early preparations for a conference in peace, security and development in the Great Lakes, under UN-Organisation of Africa Unity auspices. EU envoy Aldo Ajello continues to work to facilitate such a conference. We await the report of UN special envoy Ambassador Chretien, who has been tasked to consider next steps on the conference. We see an important role for regional summits such as that planned for Nairobi on 16 December in preparing the ground for a wider conference.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has recently held with representatives of the Governments of *(a)* Zaire, *(b)* Rwanda, *(c)* Burundi, *(d)* Uganda and *(e)* Tanzania. [8577]

Dr. Fox: My right hon. and learned Friend met His Excellency the President of Tanzania on 11 November. We are in regular contact with representatives of the Governments in the region in the search for lasting peace and stability in the Great Lakes.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the current refugee situation in the Great Lakes region of Africa, with particular reference to *(a)* the numbers of refugees, *(b)* the geographical situation of the refugees and *(c)* the health of the refugees. [8578]

Dr. Fox: On numbers and location, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my noble Friend the Minister for Overseas Development to Lord Judd in another place on 5 December, *Official Report, House of Lords,* column *61*. The condition of refugees in camps in Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda is generally good. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports that substantial numbers of refugees remain beyond the current reach of aid agencies in eastern Zaire. Their condition is unknown but is a cause for concern. With the international community, we are pressing the parties to the conflict to allow access to those in need.

Nigeria

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the recent Commonwealth ministerial action group mission to Nigeria. [8580]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Commonwealth ministerial action group visited Nigeria from 18 to 20 November. The CMAG met General Abacha, representatives of the National Electoral Commission and the transition committees, leaders of the recently registered political parties, traditional rulers and the chairman of the Nigerian Human Rights Commission. The group welcomed the release of three human rights activists during the visit, but pressed for the immediate release of all political prisoners, including Chief Abiola. The CMAG also urged Nigerians to resolve the case of the Ogoni 19, review prison conditions and restore accountable civilian government. My noble Friend Baroness Chalker also had bilateral discussions with human rights and pro-democracy groups. The group will meet again in the new year to consider next steps.

United Nations Industrial Development Organisation

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the British Government have for continued participation in UNIDO; and what discussions he is currently having with representatives of UNIDO. [8688]

Dr. Liam Fox: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on 10 December, at column *100*.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Publicity

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much her Department has spent on promotional or public information campaigns in each of the last five years; and how much she estimates will be spent on these campaigns during the (i) current and (ii) next financial years. [7543]

Mr. Sproat: My Department's public relations activities are normally met in-house. During 1993–94, my Department spent £62,500 contracting a company to assist with a programme of events to mark the 50th anniversary of D day.

Other than that, there have been no individual promotional or public information campaigns undertaken by the Department since its inception in 1992. There are at present no plans for any such campaigns in the future.

National Lottery

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the eligibility of canal restoration schemes for funding from the national lottery funding bodies. [7949]

Mr. Sproat: Canal restoration schemes are eligible to apply for funding from the national lottery. The distributing bodies make their funding decisions independently of Government, and against their published criteria.

The Millennium Commission has awarded £11.9 million to the Rochdale canal trust to restore 32 miles of the Rochdale canal. The heritage lottery fund made its largest grant to date, £25.1 million, to British Waterways to secure the structure, operation, and environment of the 87-mile Kennet and Avon canal, making it accessible for the enjoyment of future generations.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will take steps to enable animal welfare groups to be eligible for lottery funding; and if she will make a statement. [7777]

Mr. Sproat: Any organisation established for charitable, benevolent or philanthropic purposes, including animal welfare charities, is eligible to apply to the National Lottery Charities Board. Animal welfare charities are, therefore, welcome to make appropriate applications. The board makes grants to charities and voluntary organisations according to the priorities set for each grants round; I understand that chief executives of several animal welfare charities have welcomed this approach and agreed that the most appropriate round in which to apply is that aimed at improving people's living environment; this round is due to be launched next year.

Broadcasting

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 3 December, *Official Report*, column *589*, how the shortlist for the job of chairman of the BBC Broadcasting Council for Wales was drawn up; on what dates the interviews took place; on what dates the unsuccessful candidates were told the news; what assessment was made of the recommendations of the Nolan committee; and what use was made of the public appointments unit in processing this appointment. [7986]

Mr. Sproat: In considering the appointment of the BBC national governor for Wales, who chairs the Broadcasting Council for Wales, we are applying the principles established by the Nolan committee as set out in guidance issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Further information about the process can be made available once the appointment has been made by Her Majesty in Council.

British Library Catalogue

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if all the books currently being transferred to the new British library have been catalogued. [8198]

Mr. Sproat: Responsibility for transferring the books to the new British library building at St. Pancras falls to the British library. It has confirmed that all the books currently being transferred have been catalogued.

Television Licences (Revenue)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the total revenue from television licences over the last 12-month period for which figures are available in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* Scotland. [8011]

Mr. Sproat: Total television licence revenue in the United Kingdom for the financial year 1995–96 was £1,820 million, of which an estimated £156 million was collected in Scotland.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much her Department will spend on Christmas trees and decorations this year; how many Christmas trees will be bought for her Department's headquarters; and what are the type and country of origin of the trees. [7564]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* A Christmas tree of British origin, Abis Nordmanniana, with decorations will be purchased at a total cost of £65 for one of my Department's HQ buildings.

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the *(a)* cost and *(b)* percentage of the full television licence paid by (i) pensioners, (ii) registered blind people and (iii) registered deaf people; if she will make it her policy to reduce the cost of the television licence for each of these groups; and if she will make a statement. [7955]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* Television licence fees are currently £89.50 for colour licences and £30 for black and white. Registered blind people are entitled to a reduction of £1.25 from the full licence fee. However, a sound-only television monitor, available from the Royal National Institute for the Blind, may be operated without a licence. Moreover, blind people can enjoy the full range of the BBC's radio services. There is no general concession for pensioners or for registered deaf people. However, pensioners and registered blind and deaf people living in qualifying accommodation can benefit from the concessionary television licence scheme, under which licences cost £5. If the Government introduced reduced-fee television licences for all pensioners and registered blind and deaf people, this would be very costly in terms of lost revenue for the BBC. it would lead to a significant rise in licence fees for all other viewers, irrespective of their means, which is why the Government have no such plans.

The Government have encouraged the BBC to introduce a range of payment options to enable television

licence fee payers to spread the cost of their licence. However, the Government do not consider the television licence fee a proper instrument of social policy: the appropriate way to help those with special needs is through the pensions and benefits system.

Mid-week Lottery

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions she has had with Office of the National Lottery on the numbers to be used by Camelot in the proposed mid-week lottery. [8041]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* None. Camelot applied to hold a mid-week draw using the numbers 1 to 49. The decision to approve the mid-week draw was made by the Director General of the National Lottery who published a full statement of the reasons for his decision.

PRIME MINISTER

The Union

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the strategic and economic interests which require the maintenance of the Union between Scotland and England and which do not apply to the Union with Northern Ireland. [7202]

The Prime Minister: I firmly believe that the maintenance of the Union is strongly in the interests of each part of the United Kingdom, as well as of the United Kingdom as a whole, but there are no strategic or economic interests which could override the democratic wishes of the people of each constituent part of the United Kingdom in relation to their place within it.

HEALTH

Accident Prevention

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the recommendations of the accident prevention task force. [7983]

Mr. Horam: The accident prevention task force concentrated its efforts on identifying outstanding research and information needs in accident prevention. Its conclusions were published in the following reports which have been placed in the Library:

Improving Information on Accidents (PHIS 19), DH 1995

Agreeing an Accident Information Structure (PHIS 19B), DH 1996

Health of the Nation Accident Reduction Targets - A Research Review: What Further Work is Needed? - Dr. Irene Higginson, DH June 1995.

The Effectiveness of Interventions to Prevent Accidental Injury to Young Persons Aged 15–24 Years - Prof. Jon Nicholl *et al.*

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department has abolished the accident prevention task force. [7982]

Mr. Horam: The accident prevention task force was disbanded in May 1996 on completion of its work.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his role on the interdepartmental group on accident prevention strategies; and if he will list the programme of work currently being undertaken by that group. [7984]

Mr. Horam: There is no such group.

Dental Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists solely offered national health service treatment in *(a)* September 1992 and *(b)* September 1996. [7972]

Mr. Malone: Data on the number of dentists who offer solely national health service treatment are not collected centrally.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *372*, if he will list the number of national health service dentists for each health authority in England on *(a)* 30 September 1992 and *(b)* 30 September 1996. [7985]

Mr. Malone: Data on the number of general dental service dentists were collected by family health services authority before 1 April 1996 and by health authority thereafter. The data at 30 September 1992 and 30 September 1996 are set out in tables 1 and 2.

Boundary changes have taken place and even where the authorities have the same name the authority areas may not be identical.

Table 1: General Dental Service: number of dentists by family health services authority, at 30 September 1992

England

Family Health Services Authority	*Number of dentists*
England	15,411
Cleveland	166

Table 1: General Dental Service: number of dentists by family health services authority, at 30 September 1992

England

Family Health Services Authority	*Number of dentists*
Cumbria	143
Durham	142
Northumberland	83
Gateshead	64
Newcastle upon Tyne	96
North Tyneside	59
South Tyneside	45
Sunderland	70
Humberside	205
North Yorkshire	235
Bradford	144
Calderdale	56
Kirklees	116
Leeds	258
Wakefield	87
Derbyshire	257
Leicestershire	238
Lincolnshire	123
Nottinghamshire	272
Barnsley	62
Doncaster	85
Rotherham	62
Sheffield	165
Cambridgeshire	179
Norfolk	223
Suffolk	196
Bedfordshire	140
Hertfordshire	381
Barnet	139
Brent and Harrow	192
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	259
Hillingdon	80
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	209
Essex	438
Barking and Havering	99
Camden and Islington	175
City and East London	175
Enfield and Haringey	168
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	147
East Sussex	273
Kent	495
Greenwich and Bexley	150
Bromley	123
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	268
Surrey	455
West Sussex	283
Croydon	125
Kingston and Richmond	128
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	246
Dorset	229
Hampshire	512
Wiltshire	173
Isle of Wight	46
Berkshire	251
Buckinghamshire	243
Northamptonshire	140
Oxfordshire	191
Avon	360
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	141
Devon	366
Gloucestershire	204
Somerset	149
Hereford and Worcester	207
Salop	123
Staffordshire	237
Warwickshire	131

Table 1: General Dental Service: number of dentists by family health services authority, at 30 September 1992

England

Family Health Services Authority	*Number of dentists*
Birmingham	300
Coventry	82
Dudley	74
Sandwell	71
Solihull	53
Walsall	59
Wolverhampton	64
Cheshire	331
Liverpool	146
St. Helens and Knowsley	89
Sefton	90
Wirral	112
Lancashire	421
Bolton	74
Bury	55
Manchester	177
Oldham	69
Rochdale	57
Salford	62
Stockport	107
Tameside	66
Trafford	85
Wigan	85

1. The figures represent the number of dentists (principals) on the family health services authority/health list and their assistants and vocational trainees.
2. Some dentists have a contract with a more than one FHSA/HA, these dentists are counted only once.
3. The figures exclude salaried, hospital and community dentists.

Table 2: General Dental Services: number of dentists, by health services authority, at 30 September 1996

England

Family Health Services Authority	*Number of dentists*
England	16,336
Bradford	141
Calderdale and Kirklees	180
East Riding	143
Gateshead and South Tyneside	122
Leeds	256
Newcastle and North Tyneside	157
North Cumbria	107
North Yorkshire	264
Northumberland	96
Sunderland	74
Tees	183
Wakefield	92
County Durham	151
Barnsley	54
South Humber	72
Doncaster	92
Leicestershire	257
Lincolnshire	134
North Derbyshire	108
North Nottinghamshire	106
Nottingham	200
Rotherham	68
Sheffield	181
South Derbyshire	156
Bedfordshire	150
Berkshire	276
Buckinghamshire	238
Cambridge and Huntingdon	121
East Norfolk	219

Table 2: General Dental Services: number of dentists, by health services authority, at 30 September 1996

England

Family Health Services Authority	*Number of dentists*
Northamptonshire	158
North West Anglia	105
Oxfordshire	195
Suffolk	201
Enfield and Haringey	191
East London and The City	193
Barking and Havering	114
South Essex	210
Brent and Harrow	202
North Essex	266
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	316
Camden and Islington	185
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	203
Redbridge and Waltham forest	152
Barnet	141
Hillingdon	89
West Hertfordshire	214
East and North Hertfordshire	193
Bexley and Greenwich	146
Bromley	123
Croydon	134
Kingston and Richmond	139
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	253
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	276
East Surrey	195
West Surrey	271
East Kent	182
West Kent	358
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	289
West Sussex	295
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	149
North and East Devon	166
South and West Devon	224
Somerset	163
Avon	379
Wiltshire	177
North and Mid Hampshire	178
Southampton and South-west Hampshire	177
Portsmouth and South-east Hampshire	167
Dorset	240
Isle of Wight	43
Gloucestershire	201
Herefordshire	62
Worcestershire	173
Shropshire	126
North Staffordshire	108
South Staffordshire	152
Warwickshire	144
Birmingham	304
Coventry	77
Dudley	84
Sandwell	84
Solihull	59
Walsall	58
Wolverhampton	64
Bury and Rochdale	122
East Lancashire	157
Liverpool	150
Manchester	172
Morecambe Bay	103
North Cheshire	89
North West Lancashire	159
St. Helens and Knowsley	96
Salford and Trafford	152
Sefton	92
South Cheshire	244

Table 2: General Dental Services: number of dentists, by health services authority, at 30 September 1996

England

Family Health Services Authority	*Number of dentists*
South Lancashire	83
Stockport	110
Wigan and Bolton	178
Wirral	129
West Pennine	154

1. The figures represent the number of dentists (principals) on the family health services authority/health authority list and their assistants and vocational trainees.
2. Some dentists have a contract with a more than one FHSA/HA, these dentists are counted only once.
3. The figures exclude salaried, hospital and community dentists.

Mental Health

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the NHS executive's regional office network monitors the mental health services' implementation of the care programme approach; and if the results of the monitoring are publicly available. [8263]

Mr. Burns: Implementation of the care programme approach is monitored via quarterly returns made by health authorities to the national health service executive.

The results of the monitoring are not routinely published.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 4 November, *Official Report*, columns *397–98*, what was the average length of the previous stay in hospital of the 5,000 patients aged 16 to 64 years readmitted as emergencies within 90 days of discharge. [8259]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not available centrally.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 31 October, *Official Report*, column *197*, what schemes for (i) residential and (ii) 24-hour nursed care accommodation for mentally ill patients under 65 years are currently being negotiated under the private finance initiative. [8257]

Mr. Horam: All capital schemes have to be tested for private finance. The table shows those schemes with a capital value of £1 million or more that are currently, or will be, tested for private finance and which are wholly or partly for 24-hour nursed care or residential accommodation for mentally ill patients under 65. Information on smaller schemes is not held centrally.

Trust	*Scheme*
Addenbrooke's NHS Trust	Mental Health Strategy Phase 2
Aylesbury Vale Community Healthcare NHS Trust	Mental Health Intensive Care Unit
Mid-Anglia Community Health NHS Trust	Acute mental Health—Ward G8
North West Anglia Healthcare NHS Trust	Mental Health Reprovision
Oxfordshire Mental Healthcare NHS Trust	Medium Secure Unit
South Bedfordshire Community Healthcare NHS Trust	Fairfield Reprovision
Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust	Integrated Acute Psychiatric Services
Guild Community Healthcare NHS Trust	Medium Secure Unit
Calderstones NHS Trust	Medium Secure Unit
Portsmouth Healthcare NHS Trust	Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Schemes
Salisbury Healthcare NHS Trust	Inpatient Mental Health Scheme
Black Country Mental Health NHS Trust	Acute Psychiatric Unit
Northern Birmingham Mental Health Services NHS Trust	Reprovision of Community Based Facilities
Walsgrave Hospitals NHS Trust	Project 2002
North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust	Reprovision of Mental Illness and Health Services
BHB Community Healthcare NHS Trust	Long Stay mental Health Reprovision
Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust	Mental Health Reprovision
Riverside Mental Health NHS Trust	Long Stay Mental Health Reprovision
Leeds Community and Mental Health Services Teaching NHS Trust	Reprovision of Mental Health Services
South Durham Healthcare NHS Trust	New Acute Mental Health Facilities
South Durham Healthcare NHS Trust	25 Bed Facility with Treatment Suites
Leeds Community and Mental Health Services Teaching NHS Trust	Seacroft Mental Health Unit
Calderdale Healthcare NHS Trust	Centralisation of Acute Hospital Services
Community Healthcare: North Durham NHS Trust	Facilities for Difficult to Place Patients
Chichester Priority Services NHS Trust	Graylingwell Reprovision
Hastings and Rother NHS Trust	Mental Health Reprovision
North Downs Community Health NHS Trust	Farnham Hospital Development
Surrey Heartlands NHS Trust	West Park Hospital Reprovision
Worthing Priority Care NHS Trust	Homefield Hospital Redevelopment
North Kent Healthcare NHS Trust	Sheppey Community Hospital
Oxleas NHS Trust	Bexley Hospital Reprovision
Lewisham and Guys Mental Health NHS Trust	Adolescent Psychiatry Unit
Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust	Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to discuss with the Royal College of Psychiatrists the reasons for the readmission of 5,000 patients aged 16 to 64 years to hospitals as emergencies within 90 days of previous discharge between April and June 1996. [8261]

Mr. Burns: None.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many psychiatric patients aged between 16 and 64 years who were discharged from hospital in the period from July to September were readmitted to hospital within 90 days of discharge or by the present date. [8260]

Mr. Burns: From the information collected centrally it is not possible to identify how many of the psychiatric patients aged 16 to 64 who were discharged during the period July to September have subsequently been readmitted as emergencies.

Meningitis

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the link between over-prescribing of antibiotics and meningitis clusters. [8024]

Mr. Horam: We are aware of the recent publication of a scientific paper reporting on a study conducted by the Gloucester public health laboratory in 1987 which a Sunday newspaper reported as suggesting an association between meningitis and the high use of antibiotics. However, the scientific paper, which has produced some interesting observations, explores several possible explanations. Further work is necessary before any conclusions can be reached and the public health laboratory service's meningococcal committee is to consider recommendations on future work.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents of each strain of meningitis have been reported in England and Wales in each year since 1990. [8025]

Mr. Horam: The numbers of laboratory confirmed cases of meningococcal meningitis since 1990 are given in the table:

Isolates of N Meningitidis received at the Public Health Laboratory Service's Meningococcal Reference Laboratory 1990–1996, England and Wales

Group	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*[1]
A	13	6	7	2	1	0	0
B	997	959	923	929	789	921	736
C	466	394	326	319	291	468	507
Other groups	24	39	45	47	48	70	62
All groups	1,500	1,398	1,301	1,297	1,129	1,459	1,305

[1] To 15 November 1996 only.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were diagnosed as suffering from meningitis in each of the area health authorities in West Yorkshire in the past 12 months. [8092]

Mr. Horam: Information is not available in the form requested. Notification data are routinely collected by local authority and district rather than health authority. Provisional numbers of cases of meningitis notified to the Office for National Statistics, and the notification rates per 100,000 population, for the county of West Yorkshire for the last 12 months are given in the table:

Provisional numbers of meningitis notifications in West Yorkshire October 1995–September 1996.

County-West Yorkshire	*Number of meningitis notifications*[1]	*Annual notification rates per 100,000*
County District		
Bradford	41	8.5
Calderdale	9	4.7
Kirklees	15	3.9
Leeds	44	6.1
Wakefield	6	1.9
West Yorkshire	115	5.5

[1] Notifications are made on the suspicion of clinical disease, not all of which will be confirmed cases of meningitis.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice his Department has given or plans to give to local health authorities in respect of a possible winter meningitis outbreak; and if he will make a statement. [8093]

Mr. Horam: Guidelines on the control of meningococcal infection have been issued by the public health laboratory service since 1989. These are regularly updated and published and copies are sent to all directors of public health and consultants in communicable disease control. The most recent guidelines on the control of meningococcal infection were issued on 8 December 1995 in the PHLS's communicable disease review.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the annual total of recorded incidents of MRSA in England and Wales for each year since 1992 in *(a)* hospitals, *(b)* nursing homes and *(c)* other locations. [8029]

Mr. Horam: Data are not available in the form requested.

The public health laboratory service publishes aggregate data on the occurrence of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus from isolates voluntarily submitted by hospitals in England and Wales for specialist typing. The total numbers of incidents—three or more patients with the same strain of MRSA in a month from the same hospitals—since 1992 are as follows:

1992: 339

1993: 549

1994: 1,073

1995: 1,575

1996[1]: 1,764

[1] to 31 October.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many fatalities have been recorded as due to MRSA in each year since 1990. [8031]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr Flynn) on 19 November at columns *532–33*.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the threat of MRSA in hospitals; and what precautions are taken against its spread. [8032]

Mr. Horam: Methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus is no more likely to cause infection and no worse infection than methicillin-sensitive strains of the organism. Because, however, MRSA is more difficult to treat, it can pose a threat to certain vulnerable patients. Most experts therefore believe efforts to prevent its spread are worth while.

All hospitals have specialist infection control teams whose function is to advise on the precautions necessary, in the individual circumstances of each hospital and according to the type of patient, to prevent the spread of infection. The Department issued guidance to the national health service in September 1994 on the control of MRSA and in March 1995 on the general control of infections in hospitals, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on research into MRSA in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [8237]

Mr. Malone: The main agency through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council. The council is an independent body which receives its grant in aid from the Department of Trade and Industry. The council does not currently fund any research specifically into methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus. However, the council does have a portfolio of research on staphylococcal bacteria in general, which underpins research into MRSA. This amounted to £200,000 in 1994–95 and £144,000 in 1995–96.

In addition, two research projects have been funded at regional level, amounting to £47,706 in total.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents of MRSA in 1995 occurred in *(a)* geriatric wards, *(b)* intensive care, *(c)* surgical wards, *(d)* general medical wards and *(e)* other wards. [8034]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what factors underlie the trend in reported incidents of MRSA in hospitals; and what evaluation he has made of the extent to which *(a)* standards of hygiene, *(b)* re-use of infected equipment and *(c)* patient turnover contribute to the spread of MRSA. [8037]

Mr. Horam: The trend in reported incidents of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus—three or more patients with the same strain of MRSA in a month from the same hospitals—reflects, in part, the emergence and spread, from the early 1990s, of two new strains of MRSA. Other factors include changes in medical practice, such as the transfer of more patients to specialist units in other hospitals.

Good personal hygiene, such as thorough hand washing, is important in preventing the spread of all types of infections, including those caused by MRSA. The Department has made no evaluation of re-use of equipment and patient throughput on the spread of MRSA. These are matters for individual trusts and health authorities to consider.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's policy in respect of the practice of sending home patients with MRSA in order to prevent its spread in hospital. [8038]

Mr. Horam: The Department issued guidance to the national health service in September 1994 on the control of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus. MRSA does not pose a risk to healthy people.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents of MRSA were reported during 1995 in *(a)* each member state of the European Community and *(b)* the United States of America. [8039]

Mr. Horam: We are not aware of any other country which routinely compiles national data on methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the drugs currently being trialled in the United Kingdom aimed at alleviating the symptoms of MS. [8214]

Mr. Malone: Such information is confidential. Section 118 of the Medicines Act 1968 precludes the disclosure of confidential information received in pursuance of the Act.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those areas of the United Kingdom where there are MS clusters. [8197]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Questions relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, respectively.

General Practitioner Fundholders

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each health authority the amount borrowed from the underspend by local general practitioner fundholders in each of the last five years; and how much of this amount has been repaid by each health authority to date. [8035]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not held centrally. We expect health authorities and fundholding general practitioners to work together to make the best use of resources in year.

Repair and Maintenance Backlog

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the overall repair and maintenance backlog at NHS facilities within the areas controlled by each NHS executive regional office in each year since 1991. [8036]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 19 November 1996 at column *529*.

Disability Allowance

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department proposes to take to monitor the impact of the changes to the disability allowance mobility component for hospital patients with reference to the extent to which *(a)* the mobility opportunities for hospital patients are fully maintained, *(b)* patients leave hospital treatment prematurely to avoid the cut-off point for the mobility component and *(c)* the rehabilitation of hospital patients is hindered. [8211]

Mr. Horam: None. This is a matter for local decision by health authorities and trusts.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he is issuing to local authorities concerning the evaluation of alternative care options for people with learning difficulties. [8209]

Mr. Burns: I will write to all directors of social services and chief executives of health authorities about the second phase of the research project evaluating various types of residential support for people with learning disabilities before Christmas. I intend to make it clear in my letter that departmental guidance remains as set out in LAC(92)15, copies of which are available in the Library, and that therefore all forms of residential provision including village communities remain options to be considered by those planning and purchasing services.

NHS Dentistry Contracts

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for how long records relating to the payment of NHS dentistry contracts are retained. [8433]

Mr. Malone: The dental practice board retains dental claim forms in prior approval cases for 18 months and non-prior approval cases for 13 months. The dental payment schedules are retained on microfiche back to June 1989.

Vitamin B12 Unit

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the timetable for the independent review of the vitamin B12 unit at the Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare NHS trust; who are the members of the review body; and what are the terms of reference of the review. [8430]

Mr. Horam: The inquiry into the work of the vitamin B12 unit at the Chelsea and Westminster hospital is the responsibility of, and has been commissioned by, the Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare national health service trust.

The members of the inquiry are Professor Albert Aynsley-Green, Nuffield professor of child health, and Professor Brian Neville, professor of paediatric neurosciences at the institute of child health, university of London. It is intended that the inquiry will finish by March 1997 and report to the trust board in April.

The terms of reference are:

1. To review the process of the hospital's clinical management of the patients for whom the vitamin B12 unit has provided advice or resources for investigation from 1 April 1994 to date.
2. In particular to advise whether reasonable steps have been taken by the trust to ensure the appropriate treatment of the patients according to the principles of evidence-based medicine and effective and safe healthcare.
3. As necessary, to consider and review issues which may arise from an NHS point of view with regard to the management aspects of clinical research and the treatment associated with it.
4. To advise on the future NHS management arrangements by the trust for patients whose neurodevelopmental diagnosis and/or treatment may involve the services of the vitamin B12 unit.

Injury Prevention and Control

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department has signed the Melbourne declaration on injury prevention and control, adopted on 22 February. [8644]

Mr. Horam: The "Melbourne declaration" does not provide for formal endorsement by Government of its conclusions. The Government demonstrated their commitment to accident prevention by including it as a key area in their "The Health of the Nation" strategy launched in 1992.

WALES

NHS Pension Scheme

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what actuarial reports have been carried out on the effect on the NHS pension scheme's overall liabilities of including general practitioners' staff in the scheme; and if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the reports. [7482]

Mr. Hague: The Government are considering the case for allowing general practitioners' practice staff to enter the national health service pension scheme and a decision will be announced soon.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* hip replacements, *(b)* hysterectomies, *(c)* cataract extractions, *(d)* tonsillectomies, *(e)* kidney transplants and *(f)* hernia operations were carried out by the NHS in Wales in each of the last three years; what was the average waiting time for each operation in each year; and if he will make a statement. [7468]

Mr. Hague: The information is given in the following table:

Number and average waiting time for specified operations

	1993–94		*1994–95*		*[1]1995–96*	
	Number	*Average waiting time (days)*	*Number*	*Average waiting time (days)*	*Number*	*Average waiting time (days)*
Hip replacements	1,649	161	1,842	152	1,793	138
Hysterectomies	3,487	85	3,427	86	3,542	91
Cataract extractions	8,489	170	9,374	158	10,491	145
Tonsillectomies	4,606	171	4,756	197	5,224	167
Kidney transplants	9	99	8	23	10	24
Hernia operations	3,748	91	3,918	103	3,975	110

[1] Data for 1995–96 are not comparable to earlier years as records are not yet available for all hospitals.

Dental Services

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many new NHS registrations in Wales with a dental practitioner occurred in each six-month period between January 1990 and January 1994 and in each month since January 1994; how many of these are estimated to have been duplicate registrations; and if he will make a statement. [7491]

Mr. Hague: Information on the number of new registrations is given in the following table. It is not possible to identify how many of the registrations were for patients who re-registered after lapsing, were already registered with another dentist, or who were completely new registrations.

Number of new NHS registrations with dentists in Wales

Period	*Number*	*Period*	*Number*
October–December 1990[1]	449,989	March 1995	53,721
January–June 1991	640,040	April 1995	59,114
July–December 1991	386,458	May 1995	52,557
January–June 1992	385,586	June 1995	40,823
July–December 1992	350,665	July 1995	37,463
January–June 1993	350,340	August 1995	37,912
July–December 1993	285,074	September 1995	55,585
January 1994	36,814	October 1995	47,896
February 1994	71,366	November 1995	42,353
March 1994	57,521	December 1995	42,841
April 1994	46,531	January 1996	49,473
May 1994	56,672	February 1996	51,978
June 1994	52,790	March 1996	59,338
July 1994	52,585	April 1996	53,969
August 1994	44,855	May 1996	53,283
September 1994	45,615	June 1996	51,970
October 1994	45,527	July 1996	49,578
November 1994	61,153	August 1996	53,562
December 1994	50,976	September 1996	76,164
January 1995	40,295	October 1996	54,648
February 1995	78,188	November 1996	59,694

[1] There are no new registrations in October 1990, the first month of the new dental contract.

Council House Repairs

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amounts of cash were available for the modernisation and repair of council homes in (i) 1992, (ii) 1993 and (iii) 1995; and if he will make a statement. [7772]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Credit approvals made available by the Department for capital expenditure on council housing can be supplemented by authorities' use of some capital receipts and revenue contributions. In addition, councils have some flexibility in the level of spending on revenue repairs within the housing revenue account. The following table, therefore, shows capital and revenue spending by Welsh councils in cash terms on modernisation and repair of council houses in 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1995–96.

£ million

	Revenue spending	*Capital spending*	*Total*
1992–93	112.4	75.4	187.8
1993–94	119.6	84.6	204.2
1994–95	126.3	88.4	214.7

Physiotherapy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he proposes to reduce the waiting times for those seeking physiotherapy after suffering accidents and injuries; and if he will make a statement. [7774]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The number of training places for occupational therapy and physiotherapy being contracted for by the NHS in Wales has increased from an intake of 25 in 1993–94 to 57 in 1996–97 for occupational therapists. The number of training places has also increased for physiotherapy from an intake of 36 in 1993–94 to 69 in 1996–97. This increased level of training will be maintained in 1997–98.

Public Appointments

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many re-appointments to non-departmental public boards in Wales there were in 1995; and if he will make a statement. [7910]

Mr. Hague: I or my predecessor made 123 re-appointments to NDPBS or NHS bodies in Wales in 1995.

Housing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the amount available to Tai Cymru in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* the latest available year for new housing association homes in Wales. [7763]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The capital programme for housing associations, including private finance, in 1991–92 was £160.4 million. In the current financial year this is forecast to be £154.4 million.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many social housing lettings were made in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1995. [7767]

Mr. Evans: In the financial years 1992–93 and 1995–96, there were 17,089 and 21,088 lettings, excluding transfer and exchanges. These data are a combination of local authority lettings figures from annual returns, together with a summary of housing association lettings from the continual recording of the lettings system.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of new homes required up to the year 2000. [7768]

Mr. Evans: Estimates of additional homes required were published in the 1992-based household projections, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. This report expected the average number of additional homes each year, up to the year 2000, to be 8,800.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many private homes were built in *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1995. [7769]

Mr. Evans: This information is in table 2.3 of Welsh housing statistics 1996, which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of *(a)* council and *(b)* housing association homes required in each of the years to 2000. [7770]

Mr. Evans: A breakdown in the form requested is not available. Our estimate for subsidised dwellings for each years is between 2,500 and 3,500.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the revenue costs of running his Department in (i) 1994 and (ii) 1995; and if he will make a statement. [7911]

Mr. Hague: My Department's running costs were £77.4 million in 1994–95 and £74.9 million in 1995–96.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future role of the community health councils. [8172]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: I envisage no change in the statutory roles and functions of community health councils in Wales.

Graduate Unemployment

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many graduates are currently on the unemployed register in Wales. [8524]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The unemployment register does not hold details of the qualifications held by claimants so the information requested is not available.

Injury Prevention and Control

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department has signed the Melbourne declaration on injury prevention and control, adopted on 22 February. [8642]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Melbourne declaration does not provide for formal endorsement by Government of its conclusions. Its main recommendations are, however, already being taken forward in Wales through implementation of the "Protocol for Investment in Health Gain: Injuries". Injury prevention and control is also identified as a health priority area in "Caring for the Future". Welsh mortality rates for injury are now among the lowest in Europe.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current level of spending on the NHS in Wales; and what it was in 1993. [8171]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The level of provision for the NHS in Wales in 1993–94 was £1,975 million and in 1996–97 is £2,275 million.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Part-time Working

17. **Ms Gordon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she plans to take to assist people who are currently working part time who want to find a full-time job. [7067]

Mr. Forth: We shall continue to oppose unnecessary regulations, such as the social chapter, the national minimum wage and the working time directive which would make it harder for employees to choose freely between full-time and part-time work.

Clinical Staff Pay

18. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals she has to ensure pay comparability between clinical academic staff and national health service staff. [7068]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has placed a condition of grant on the Higher Education Funding Council for England from 1997–98. This will require the council to enable universities and colleges to meet any additional costs for medical schools arising from any pay increase awarded by the Government to NHS clinicians.

Education Budget (London)

20. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the effect of the budget settlement on *(a)* class sizes and *(b)* education attainment in (i) Southwark and (ii) London local education authorities. [7070]

Mr. Robin Squire: The effects of the settlement upon class sizes and the attainment of pupils will depend upon decisions taken by Southwark and other London LEAs. If they give priority to the chalk face and to improving teacher quality, there is no reason why class sizes should rise.

Lifetime Learning

21. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to increase acceptance of the concept of a lifetime of learning. [7071]

Mr. Paice: We fully support the concept of lifetime learning. Copies of the Department's policy framework on lifetime learning published in June are available in the Library. Our most recent initiative to promote lifetime learning are learning line—a new free national telephone helpline on learning opportunities to be launched in September 1997—support for further development of local partnership activities, and our recently published strategic guidance "TECs Beyond 2000" which asks TECs to extend their work with employers and their other partners to create a culture for lifetime learning locally.

Higher Education Vouchers

22. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make it her policy to introduce a voucher system for higher education. [7072]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has no plans at present to introduce a voucher system for higher education. She has set up an inquiry under Sir Ron Dearing to look at how our higher education system should develop to meet the needs of the UK over the next 20 years. We will consider carefully its recommendations on the future funding of higher education, when it reports next summer.

Examination Results

23. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* grant-maintained and *(b)* local education authority schools are represented in the top 50 state schools measured by A-level results. [7073]

Mrs. Gillan: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring).

Private Finance Initiative

24. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she will next meet the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals to discuss the role of the private finance initiative. [7074]

Mr. Forth: There are no plans to do so at present.

Assisted Places Scheme

25. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is her most recent assessment of the impact of the assisted places scheme on the feeder schools from which the assisted pupils are drawn. [7075]

Mrs. Gillan: The assisted places scheme gives able children from low-income families the opportunity of an excellent education at good independent schools.

Job Creation

26. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to encourage the creation of more full-time jobs. [7076]

Mr. Forth: We shall continue to develop the policies and programmes which have reduced unemployment by nearly 1 million and increased employment by nearly three quarters of a million since 1993 and which have reduced unemployment in Scotland, Wales and every English region to below the average rate in the European Union.

Corporal Punishment

28. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on her policy in respect of corporal punishment in the independent school sector. [7079]

Mr. Forth: We do not support any change in the present law which prohibits the use of corporal punishment for publicly funded pupils in independent schools. It is, however, still permissable for parents of privately funded pupils in independent schools on grounds of parental freedom to choose a school with disciplinary arrangements of which they approve. But where it is administered, the law requires that such punishment must not be inhuman or degrading.

Teachers (Payment for Extra Work)

29. **Mr. Chris Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on her policy with regard to the payment of teachers for out-of-hours and extra-curriculum work. [7080]

Mr. Forth: The statutory conditions of employment for teachers set rates of pay for the whole of a teacher's job. Within that framework, governing bodies can at their discretion pay teachers for a variety of extra-curricular professional activities that might take place out of school hours.

Dyslexia

30. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what special provision she has made with respect to teaching pupils with dyslexia. [7081]

Mrs. Gillan: The code of practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs emphasises the need for early identification of learning difficulties such as dyslexia, and sets out guidance to local education authorities and schools on the assessment of a dyslexic child. In 1995–96 almost £1 million of expenditure under the grants for education support and training programme supported training for teachers of dyslexic pupils. The Department is supporting research into assessment and teaching strategies for dyslexia with grants of more than £200,000 over the period 1992 to 1998. The Government propose that there should be a particular focus on literacy in the new national curriculum for initial teacher training; the Teacher Training Agency will be consulting on this in the new year, when comments from organisations representing dyslexia will be welcome.

Age Discrimination

31. **Mrs. Wise:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to reduce discrimination against potential employees on the grounds of age. [7082]

Mrs. Gillan: The Department promotes the Government's campaign for older workers which persuades employers to recruit, train and retain them on merit, disregarding age. Through the campaign, which is supported by complementary booklets, regional presentations to employers and media coverage, we offer help, advice and support to older people seeking work. There is sound evidence that the campaign is working; many employers are reviewing their practices and policies towards older workers.

Education Authority Expenditure

32. **Mr. Deva:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many local education authorities increased the amount spent on administration and reduced the amount spent on schools in the last year for which information is available. [7084]

Mr. Robin Squire: In 1994–95, 14 LEAs increased spending on central administration while reducing spending on schools, by comparison with the previous year.

Primary School Standards

33. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what new measures she is taking to monitor standards in the primary sector. [7085]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Government's policies now enable the performance of children of primary age to be closely monitored at national, local, school and pupil level. The two main mechanisms are the assessment of performance of pupils against the national curriculum, and the regular independent inspection of all schools. We published last month the national results of the 1996 statutory assessments of all seven and 11-year-olds in English, mathematics and science, and in March we shall publish primary school performance tables. Some 7,000 primary schools have been independently inspected, with a summary of the report sent to each parent. These measures enable parents, schools and others to monitor children's progress at this vital stage in education.

Project Work

34. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of those participating in project work have gained permanent employment. [7086]

Mr. Forth: It is too early to make a proper assessment of the experience of those who leave project work, as the pilot has been running for only eight months. A full survey of those who leave project work is being carried out, and will include details of the jobs they have entered. Results of the survey will be published in 1997. Early indications, however, are that twice as many people leave project work to enter a job as leave a comparable group outside the pilot areas. There is no significant difference in the rates at which all those who leave project work, and those who leave a comparable group, return to the unemployment register.

School Discipline

35. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking with regard to discipline in schools. [7089]

Mr. Forth: The Education Bill introduced on 30 October includes a package of measures to strengthen schools' ability to take action in the face of poor behaviour and discipline; to help ensure there is proper support for schools in dealing with pupils with behaviour problems; and to promote effective provision for such pupils out of school where necessary.

Pupil Achievements (Gender Differences)

36. **Mr. Brian David Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to address the gap between the achievements of girls and boys at school. [7090]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Government's policies are intended to raise standards for all pupils, and are doing so. The improvement of girls has been even more rapid than for boys at certain ages. While this rapid improvement is very welcome, Her Majesty's chief inspector has drawn attention to the low attainment of some boys, especially at key stages 3 and 4. It is primarily for schools to address gaps in performance of different groups of pupils. In setting its annual performance targets, each school should consider how best to develop the potential of every category of pupil.

School Performance Tables

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she plans to publish value added performance tables. [7078]

Mrs. Gillan: The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority will be reporting on the development of value added measures in February 1997. Consideration will be given to the inclusion of such measures in school performance tables in the light of that report.

Schools Access Initiative

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 5 November, *Official Report*, column *426*, what financial provision she proposes to make in respect of the schools access initiative. [8053]

Mrs. Gillan: We are today announcing an extension of the schools access initiative. We will provide support totalling £12 million over the next three years for projects to make more mainstream schools accessible to pupils with disabilities. We shall encourage local education authorities and schools to seek local partnership funding to maximise the value of projects to be undertaken under the initiative.

Clinical Academic Salaries

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations she has received about changes in clinical academic salary levels. [8246]

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has received numerous representations on this matter. She announced at the time of the Budget statement that she has placed a new condition of grant on the Higher Education Funding Council for England from 1997–98 requiring the council to enable universities and colleges to meet any additional costs for medical schools arising from any pay increase awarded by the Government to NHS clinicians.

Education and Community Values

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received regarding the consultation exercise conducted by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority on values in education and community; and if she will make a statement. [8292]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend has received about 10 representations, mostly from people concerned that the distribution of questionnaires meant that the consultation was restricted. The questionnaires were distributed in accordance with prescribed samples. The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority has assured my right hon. Friend that it was at the same time open to anyone to ask for the consultation document and submit their views. SCAA will take account of all representations received to date.

Secondary School Funding

Mr. Deva: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for each year from 1992 to 1996 *(a)* the total standard spending assessment for secondary schools, *(b)* this figure expressed as an amount per secondary pupil, *(c)* the amount spent on secondary pupils and *(d)* this figure expressed as an amount per pupil for the London borough of Hounslow. [8297]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows for Hounslow local education authority secondary education *(a)* standard spending assessment and *(b)* SSA per pupil for the years 1992–93 to 1995–96; and *(c)* net institutional expenditure and *(d)* NIE per pupil in LEA schools for the years 1992–93 to 1994–95, the latest year for which outturn figures are available. All figures are in cash terms, and have not been adjusted for changes in function.

Hounslow LEA secondary education

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
(a) SSA (£m)	33.006	33.487	35.249	38.110
(b) SSA per pupil (£)	2,917	3,122	3,145	3,128
(c) NIE (£m)	33.383	29.530	32.691	n/a
(d) NIE per pupil (£)	2,419	2,282	2,582	n/a

Further Education Colleges (London)

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total allocation of funding from the Further Education Funding Council to colleges in the Greater London region in each year since 1993 in *(a)* cash prices and *(b)* current prices. [8412]

Mr. Paice: The total allocation of funding by the Further Education Funding Council to colleges in the Greater London region since 1993 is as follows:

	cash prices £ million	*current prices £ million*
1993–94	377.9	419.5
1994–95	396.7	422.7
1995–96	429.1	442.3
1996–97	427.1	427.1

Mr. Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the level of funding per full-time equivalent student from the Further Education Funding Council for colleges in the Greater London region in each year since 1993 in current prices. [8413]

Mr. Paice: The Further Education Funding Council no longer funds colleges on the basis of full-time equivalent students.

Jobseeker's Allowance (Students)

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if her Department will establish a review of students on part-time courses and their eligibility for the jobseeker's allowance. [8523]

Mr. Forth: During the passage of the Jobseekers Bill we said that we would collect more and better information on the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the jobseeker's allowance rules on education and training. We are doing this. We are also considering this issue as part of the general JSA evaluation. In addition, on 6 November I announced the workskill pilots. These will evaluate new, more flexible arrangements for people to undertake employment-related education and training while receiving JSA. The pilots are due to start in April 1997 in four areas.

Teacher Training

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list, for each year since 1993–94 and up to 2001, the target and actual intake for initial teacher training in total, for *(a)* secondary, *(b)* primary and *(c)* secondary by subject, showing the percentage change between the target and actual intake and the revised targets for 1997–98; and if she will make a statement. [8609]

Mr. Forth: The following table shows the actual and target intakes to initial teacher training courses in England from 1993–94 to 1996–97 with target intakes for 1997–98 to 1999–2000.

ITT target and actual intake in each subject area since 1993

		1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97 provisional*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–00*
England								
Primary	Target	13,937	12,990	12,115	11,500	11,050	10,900	10,800
	Actual	15,775	13,743	13,603	12,470	—	—	—
		13 per cent.	6 per cent.	12 per cent.	8 per cent.			
Secondary								
Art	Target	725	810	825	900	950	1,000	1,000
	Actual	703	754	818	900	—	—	—
		–3 per cent.	–7 per cent.	–1 per cent.	0 per cent.			
History	Target	605	790	780	850	900	900	900
	Actual	669	927	872	900	—	—	—
		11 per cent.	17 per cent.	12 per cent.	6 per cent.			

ITT target and actual intake in each subject area since 1993

		1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97 provisional	1997–98	1998–99	1999–00
Music	Target	485	580	585	600	600	600	600
	Actual	461	490	548	510	—	—	—
		–5 per cent.	–16 per cent.	–6 per cent.	–15 per cent.			
RE	Target	421	500	510	700	700	800	850
	Actual	367	448	494	660	—	—	—
		–13 per cent.	–10 per cent.	–3 per cent.	–6 per cent.			
English	Target	1,362	1,710	1,832	2,100	2,150	2,150	2,150
	Actual	1,465	1,829	1,877	2,080	—	—	—
		8 per cent.	7 per cent.	2 per cent.	–1 per cent.			
Modern Language	Target	1,665	2,060	2,092	2,250	2,650	2,700	2,700
	Actual	1,542	1,789	1,790	1,750	—	—	—
		–7 per cent.	–13 per cent.	–14 per cent.	–22 per cent.			
Geography	Target	560	645	700	850	900	950	1,000
	Actual	599	636	696	840	—	—	—
		7 per cent.	–1 per cent.	–1 per cent.	–1 per cent.			
Maths	Target	1,755	2,230	2,267	2,550	2,250	1,950	1,950
	Actual	1,796	1,950	1,795	1,680	—	—	—
		1 per cent.	–13 per cent.	–21 per cent.	–34 per cent.			
Science	Target	2,615	3,200	3,402	3,700	3,300	3,000	3,000
	Actual	2,373	2,918	2,794	2,930			
		–9 per cent.	–9 per cent.	–18 per cent.	–21 per cent.			
Technology	Target	2,119	2,360	2,312	2,700	3,200	3,200	3,200
	Actual	1,991	2,133	1,854	1,970	—	—	—
		–6 per cent.	–10 per cent.	–20 per cent.	–27 per cent.			
PE	Target	1,156	1,255	1,250	1,300	1,550	1,550	1,550
	Actual	1,074	1,309	1,311	1,380	—	—	—
		–8 per cent.	4 per cent.	5 per cent.	6 per cent.			
Other	Target	500	460	445	400	350	350	350
	Actual	481	327	378	380	—	—	—
		–4 per cent.	–29 per cent.	–15 per cent.	–5 per cent.			
All Secondary	Target	13,968	16,600	17,000	18,900	19,500	19,150	19,250
	Actual	13,491	15,510	15,226	15,980	—	—	—
		–3 per cent.	–7 per cent.	–10 per cent.	–15 per cent.	—	—	—
Total	Target	27,905	29,590	29,115	30,550	30,050	30,050	30,050
	Actual	29,266	29,253	28,829	28,450	—	—	—

Notes:
All figures include School Centred Initial Teacher Training.
English includes Drama.
Technology includes Business Studies and Home Economics.
"Other" includes Classics, Economics and Social Sciences.
1996–97 actual figures are provisional and rounded to the nearest 10.

Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total Government expenditure on national vocational qualifications, including Scottish vocational qualifications, in each year of their existence; if she will make a statement on the aims and objectives of the qualifications; and what research she has commissioned to examine the kinds of employment gained by people who gain national vocational qualifications. [8223]

Mr. Paice: Expenditure through the Department's programmes on development costs of national vocational qualifications between 1988 and March 1996 is £106 million. This figure includes £83 million from the standards programme and £23 million grant in aid to the National Council for Vocational Qualifications. For each year this is:

(£ million)

	1988–89	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96
Standards Programme	3	7	9	12	12	12	11	17
Grant in Aid	3.8	3	2.6	3.7	3.9	3.8	1.9	0
Total	6.8	10	11.6	15.7	15.9	15.8	12.9	17

The Department does not hold the information for Scottish vocational qualifications; this is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Scotland. However, the development of occupational standards through the standards programme serves both NVQs and SVQs.

National vocational qualifications provide a clear system which defines employers' needs in terms of occupational competence, assesses that competence when it has been achieved, ensures individuals undertake relevant and meaningful training and enables employers to know who has met the standards.

NVQs are gained by many different categories of individual, including those already in employment in firms as well as those entering the labour market and unemployed. Information on the employment destinations of those on youth training and training for work, many of whom gain NVQs during their training, is regularly published by the Department. Recent research published by the Department has indicated that 42 per cent. of employers using NVQs gave pay rewards to employees gaining NVQs and 58 per cent. gave greater opportunities in terms of further training, priority in promotion or work opportunities involving higher pay.

GCSE League Tables (Error)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the costs incurred in correcting the programming error in respect of a number of local education authorities' entries in the recent GCSE league tables; and if she will make a statement. [8358]

Mrs. Gillan *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* None. Fewer than 10 LEAs are affected and corrections are being made under existing errata procedures.

School Rolls

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps she is taking to ensure *(a)* the provision of new school places required by rising rolls and *(b)* the elimination of surplus places no longer required; and if she will make a statement. [7301]

Mr. Robin Squire: Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 places a duty on each local education authority to secure sufficient school places for its area unless the Secretary of State has made an order under section 27 of that Act, in which case the responsibility for providing sufficient school places may be shared with or held solely by the Funding Agency for Schools.

We look to local education authorities to take action to remove surplus places in the first instance. My right hon. Friend has powers under the Education Act 1996 to direct an authority to bring forward rationalisation proposals where numbers of surplus places appear excessive.

Both the provision of new places in areas of population growth and the cost-effective removal of surplus places are among our priority categories for capital support.

Sickness Absence

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many working days were lost through sickness by *(a)* teachers in England, *(b)* staff in the local education service and *(c)* staff in her Department in each of the last five years. [8616]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department for Education and Employment does not collect the information requested at *(a)* and *(b)*.

The numbers of working days lost through sickness by staff in my Department from 1992 to 1995 are shown in the following table. Information prior to 1992 is not available.

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Former Department for Education (including Teachers' Pensions Agency)	20,368	20,966	13,926	—
Former Employment Department (excluding Employment Service)	71,953	80,620	62,266	—
DfEE	—	—	—	[1]72,857

[1] Includes data covering all staff in the former ED and DfEE up to the merger on 5 July 1995; and in the DfEE for the remainder of the year.

National Curriculum Publications

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many national curriculum publications have been sent by her Department to schools in England, in the academic years 1994–95 and 1995–96; if she will list them; which delivery service has been used; and what has been the cost. [8621]

Mrs. Gillan: The answer is confined to the national curriculum statutory documents which set out the mandatory programmes of study and attainment targets, since information on other documents bearing on the national curriculum could be assembled only at disproportionate cost. The figures include mailings to higher and further education establishments and local education authorities, as well as to schools, for which separate figures are not available. The great majority of mailings are to schools.

All figures are to the nearest thousand.

Academic year 1994–95

3,000 documents containing programmes of study and attainment targets for the National Curriculum as it stood before the Dearing review were issued through Christians, a commercial mailing house. The documents were "English in the National Curriculum", "Mathematics in the National Curriculum", "Science in the National Curriculum", "Technology in the National Curriculum", "History in the National Curriculum", "Geography in the National Curriculum", "Modern Foreign Languages in the National Curriculum", "Art in the National Curriculum", "Music in the National Curriculum", and "Physical Education in the National Curriculum".

In January and February 1995, a total of 774,000 documents containing programmes of study and attainment targets for the revised national curriculum were issued to all schools, higher and further education establishments and local education authorities in England through Prolog, a commercial mailing house. Up to August 1995 Christians issued a further 149,000. The revised national curriculum documents are "The National Curriculum", (covering all subjects at all key stages), "Key Stages 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum", "English in the National Curriculum", "Mathematics in the National Curriculum", "Science in the National Curriculum", "Design and Technology in the National Curriculum", "Information Technology in the National Curriculum", "History in the National Curriculum", "Geography in the National Curriculum", "Modern Foreign Languages in the National Curriculum", "Art in the National Curriculum", "Music in the National Curriculum", and "Physical Education in the National Curriculum".

Invoices for mailing house charges do not correspond exactly to the academic year. From June 1994 to August 1995 they totalled £298,000. The cost of printing revised national curriculum documents was £1,093,000.

Academic year 1995–96

Forty-five thousand documents for the revised national curriculum were issued through Christians. The total cost was £61,000 for mailing house charges only.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Public Defender Scheme

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will initiate a pilot public defender scheme in England. [7516]

Mr. Streeter: It is not our intention to pilot such a scheme.

Rights of Audience

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he plans to make an announcement about rights of audience of employed advocates. [7514]

Mr. Streeter: The application for rights of audience for employed solicitors in the higher courts is still being considered by the Lord Chancellor and the designated judges, in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990. They hope to be in a position to make an announcement in the new year.

Legal Education and Conduct (Report)

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct plans to publish its fifth annual report. [9010]

Mr. Streeter: The Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct has today published its fifth annual report, and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Seat Belts

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many drivers have been prosecuted for allowing a child aged under 14 years to travel in a vehicle without wearing a seat belt or legal restraint in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [8226]

Sir John Wheeler: The number of persons proceeded against for carrying a child aged under 14 years without a seat belt are set out in the list:

1991: 55

1992: 55

1993: 69

1994: 87

1995: 99.

Computerisation of penalties other than prosecutions commenced late 1995. For the period 20 October 1995 to 7 October 1996 a total of 35,016 "advice and warnings" were given and 2,211 fixed penalty notices issued for various seat belt offences.

Operation Road Safe has been running since March 1995 and included in its priorities is the wearing of seat belts in vehicles.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate how many *(a)* drivers, *(b)* front-seat passengers and (c) back-seat passengers have been (i) killed and (ii) injured as a result of not wearing a seat belt in a vehicle in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [8228]

Mr. Moss: The information requested is set out in the following table:

	Drivers		*Front-seat passengers*		*Back-seat passengers*	
Year	*Killed*	*Injured*	*Killed*	*Injured*	*Killed*	*Injured*
1991	14	165	5	95	8	214
1992	10	231	4	124	4	222
1993	10	252	2	138	3	503
1994	10	137	1	84	9	447
1995	6	148	3	109	7	390

These figures exclude fatalities and casualties where seat belt usage is not known.

The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, in conjunction with the National Safety Council in Ireland, and with private sector sponsorship, launched a seat belt campaign on 14 October 1996 covering both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

Schools

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide a breakdown of schools in Northern Ireland by the percentages which they attract from each of the major traditions in Northern Ireland. [971]

Mr. Ancram *[pursuant to his reply, 2 November 1996, c. 473–74]:* The breakdown of schools in Northern Ireland by the percentage which they attract from each of the major traditions is given in the tables.

Table 1a: Controlled nursery schools (attended mainly by Protestant pupils)

Percentage Catholic	*Number of schools*
0	13
.01–1	0
1.1–5	11
5.1–10	7
10.1–20	4
20.1–50	12
50.1+	18

Percentages relate only to the total number of Roman Catholic and Protestant pupils.

Table 1b: Maintained nursery schools (attended mainly by Catholic pupils)

Percentage Protestant	*Number of Schools*
0	22
.01–1	0
1.1–5	2
5.1–10	0
10.1–20	1
20.1–50	1
50.1+	0

Percentages relate only to the total number of Roman Catholic and Protestant pupils.

Table 2a: Maintained primary schools (attended mainly by Catholic pupils)

Percentage Protestant	*Number of schools*
0	384
.01–1	26
1.1–5	19
5.1–10	1
10.1–20	3
20.1–50	3
50.1+	0

Percentages relate only to the total number of Roman Catholic and Protestant pupils.

Table 2b: Controlled/other maintained primary schools (attended mainly by Protestant pupils)

Percentage Catholic	*Number of schools*
0	278
.01–1	52
1.1–5	91
5.1–10	26
10.1–20	14
20.1–50	14
50.1+	11

Percentages relate only to the total number of Roman Catholic and Protestant pupils.

Table 3a: Controlled secondary/non-denominational voluntary grammar schools (attended mainly by Protestant pupils)

Percentage Catholic	*Number of schools*
0	28
.01–1	25
1.1–5	36
5.1–10	7
10.1–20	8
20.1–50	6
50.1+	1

Percentages relate only to the total number of Roman Catholic and Protestant pupils.

Table 3b: Maintained secondary schools/voluntary grammar schools under Roman Catholic management (attended mainly by Catholic pupils)

Percentage Protestant	*Number of schools*
0	83
.01–1	22
1.1–5	2
5.1–10	0
10.1–20	1
20.1–50	1
50.1+	0

Percentages relate only to the total number of Roman Catholic and Protestant pupils.

Table 4: Integrated Schools

Percentage Catholic	*Number of schools*
0–20	0
21–30	1
31–40	2
41–50	5
51–60	9
61–70	4
71+	7

Percentages relate only to the total number of Roman Catholic and Protestant pupils.

Electricity Interconnector

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the value to the Northern Ireland economy of an electricity interconnector with Scotland. [6678]

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 28 November 1996]:* None. The proposed construction of an electricity interconnector is a matter for the private companies concerned, Northern Ireland Electricity plc and Scottish Power plc. I can say, however, that the interconnector of neighbouring electricity systems is in line with UK Government and EU policy and is a central feature of Northern Ireland's energy strategy.

TRANSPORT

Motorway Service Stations

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria are used to decide where service stations should be located on motorways; and which agency has responsibility for determining proposals for service stations. [8082]

Mr. Watts: Following a change of policy announced in 1992, it is now for the private sector rather than the Department of Transport to bring forward new motorway service areas. My Department's involvement is limited to ensuring that proposals are acceptable in spacing, safety and traffic terms, and that any MSA signed from the motorway provides a specified minimum range of facilities. MSAs remain subject to the same controls as any other development, and cannot proceed unless planning permission has been granted by the local planning authority or, in the event of an appeal, the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Aircraft Noise Limits

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he will take to enforce the noise limits due to be imposed at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted from 1 January 1997. [8083]

Mr. Bowis: On 6 December, the High Court ordered a stay on the introduction of the daytime noise limit of 94 dBA Lmax and the night-time noise limit of 87 dBA Lmax at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports until the determination of an application by the International Air Transport Association for judicial review of the decision announced by my noble Friend on 28 August. The decision to improve monitoring efficiency by resiting some of the existing monitors and adding new monitors and other matters in the announcement of 28 August are unaffected.

Road Signs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the costs to British industry of inadequate and poor road signing. [8416]

Mr. Watts: There have been no recent studies of the effects nationally of road signing on British industry.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made on the effect of poor and inadequate road signing on road safety. [8420]

Mr. Bowis: The need for particular signs to be provided to maintain safety on trunk roads in England is considered on a case by case basis. Maintenance of the signs is carried out in accordance with the Highways Agency's code of practice for routine maintenance. The provision and maintenance of adequate signing on other roads are matters for the relevant highway authorities.

Aircraft Safety Standards

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those countries identified by the Federal Aviation Authority as not meeting International Civil Aviation Organisation standards. [8435]

Mr. Bowis: I refer to the reply my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) gave to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich on 26 March, *Official Report*, column *542*.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will arrange for press releases listing countries not meeting Internatinal Civil Aviation Organisation standards issued by the Federal Aviation Authority to be placed in the Library. [8436]

Mr. Bowis: No, this is not a matter for my Department.

Air Passenger Carriers' Liability

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those countries with an air passenger carriers' liability limit lower than the United Kingdom's. [8440]

Mr. Bowis: According to information provided by the European Commission, six European Union member states currently permit carriers licensed in their territory to operate international services with lower liability limits than the United Kingdom in respect of death or injury to their passengers: Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Portugal and Spain.

Details of liability requirements in countries outside the Community are not currently available. However, the proposed EC regulation on air carrier liability in case of accidents would require a third country carrier operating to, from, or within the Community to provide passengers buying a ticket within a European Union member state with full details of its liability arrangements if these do not match the new Community standards.

Channel Tunnel

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the revised safety guidance currently in place following the fire in the channel tunnel; [8439]

(2) if he will publish the documents relating to the decision by the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority to relax the evacuation standard on the channel tunnel from 90 minutes to three hours; [8437]

(3) if he will place in the Library copies of the correspondence between Eurotunnel and the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority regarding the recent decision to reopen the channel tunnel. [8438]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 6 December, *Official Report*, columns *804–805*. However, Eurotunnel issued a press notice on 9 December 1996 which summarises the main measures that were taken—both temporary and permanent—before a resumption of Eurostar and tourist shuttle services was authorised by the intergovernmental commission. I can confirm that the issues identified by Eurotunnel were those examined in detail by the safety authority. A copy of the press notice has been placed in the Library.

North-west Traffic Area Office

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 5 December, *Official Report*, column *723*, on the north-west traffic area office, what will be the amount of the payment to cover dilapidations. [8423]

Mr. Bowis: Negotiations on the amount of dilapidations are in progress between our agents and the landlord. To date, no figure has been agreed.

Seat Belts

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate how many *(a)* drivers, *(b)* front-seat passengers and *(c)* back-seat passengers have been (i) killed and (ii) injured as a result of not wearing a seat belt in a vehicle in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [8229]

Mr. Bowis: Statistics for seat belt wearing are available only until 1993 and only for the occupants of cars and vans. The position of front and back-seat passengers is available only for car passengers. The following table shows the recorded numbers of such drivers and passengers killed and injured in Great Britain while not wearing a seat belt whether or not one was fitted. The table does not include figures for the casualties where the wearing of a belt was not reported—about a quarter of all accidents.

	1991		*1992*		*1993*	
	Killed	*Injured*	*Killed*	*Injured*	*Killed*	*Injured*
Car or van drivers	209	3,307	199	3,272	151	3,143
Car or van passengers	258	13,269	211	10,983	180	9,322
Front seat car passengers	57	1,367	52	1,428	55	1,379
Rear seat car passengers	176	11,194	142	8,985	119	7,481
All van passengers	25	708	17	570	6	462

It is known how many of these casualties were as a direct result of not wearing a seat belt, but it is estimated that 510 lives and 8,800 serious injuries have been saved each year as a result of seat belts being worn.

Roads Programme

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what criteria have been altered to amend the decisions made in the 1995 review of the road programme in respect of the removal of schemes from the main programme and the promotion of schemes from the longer-term programme. [8617]

Mr. Watts: Since the review published in November 1995 as "Managing the Trunk Road Programme", the Government's Green Paper "Transport—The Way Forward", Cm 3234, has been published affecting the Government's view of priorities and there have been changes in the circumstances of individual schemes. In some cases, schemes have been reviewed to reduce their cost and scope; in some cases, costs and benefits have been updated; there has been public consultation on some schemes; some schemes have been taken forward as part of the design, build, finance and operate programme; and, in some cases, local circumstances have changed.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in respect of each of the schemes remaining in the road programme and for each scheme removed from the programme, what is the latest figure available on the ratio between current traffic and the critical traffic flow on that link and when the CTF ratio exceeded 100 per cent. or is forecast to exceed 100 per cent. [8619]

Mr. Watts: I will write to the hon. Member with details and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the appraisal methodology used to determine which trunk road improvements will *(a)* remain and *(b)* cease to be part of the road programme. [8368]

Mr. Watts: Decisions on which schemes should be included within the £6 billion road programme announced by my right hon. Friend on 26 November were taken in the light of a number of factors for each scheme, including the benefit to cost ratio, the environmental impact, the importance of the route on which the scheme was situated, the perceived importance of the scheme in the region, the actual or potential statutory or generalised blight generated by the scheme and the time at which the unimproved road was likely to experience substantial congestion. Longer-term schemes, for many of which little detailed information was yet available, were mostly withdrawn.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the regional priorities for road schemes given by the Government offices as part of the latest review of the road programme. [8365]

Mr. Watts: No. These were prepared for the purpose of the Department's internal consideration of policy options and were only one of a range of factors taken into account in reaching decisions on the content of the road programme.

Traffic Cones and Road Signs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many (i) traffic cones and (ii) road signs have been stolen in the last year; at what cost; what plans his Department has to try to reduce such figures; and if he will make a statement. [8316]

Mr. Watts: Traffic management at roadworks is provided under contract and it is the contractor's responsibility to take action to prevent theft of his equipment. No central record is kept of thefts of traffic cones or temporary road signs. We are not aware of any cases of theft of permanent road signs on the trunk road network. I understand that some local highway authorities have experienced problems and are dealing with them. This is a matter for the authorities concerned.

A1

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what impact the decision to cease the upgrading of the A1 south of Alconbury and north of Peterborough will have on the concession awarded for the upgrading by DBFO—design, build, finance and operate—of the Alconbury to Peterborough section; and what representations he has received from the concessionaires on the decision. [8367]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Roy Hughes, dated 11 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question about changes made to the Government's trunk road programme following the Chancellor's Autumn Statement. You ask what implication there might be for the A1(M) Alconbury to Peterborough Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) scheme in the light of the decision taken to withdraw other A1(M) schemes from the programme.

The A1(M) Alconbury to Peterborough DBFO concession has been awarded as part of the Government's Private Finance Initiative (PFI). One of the key objectives for any contract awarded under the PFI initiative is to achieve the optimal transfer of risk to the private sector in relation to the design, building, financing and operation of roads. For the tenderer, this means that he makes his own assessment of future traffic and accepts any associated risks. For the Department, this means that concessions will only proceed where the level of risk transferred is acceptable to the Government and represents good value for money. Any possible implications, therefore, for the A1(M) Alconbury to Peterborough DBFO concession following changes to the trunk road programme, are entirely a matter for the DBFO Company.

To date, no approach has been received from the DBFO Company on this matter.

Cones Hotline

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what final estimate he has made of the *(a)* average daily and *(b)* total gross cost to all the Departments and agencies involved in the national cone hotline; and if he will make a statement. [8313]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave him on 26 March 1996, *Official Report*, column *547*,

and on 10 July 1995, *Official Report,* column *403,* and to the letter the chief executive of the Highways Agency wrote to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 6 November 1995, *Official Report,* columns *759–60.*

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many calls to the national cone hotline *(a)* were made and *(b)* required remedial action to be taken; and if he will make a statement. [8314]

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to the letter the chief executive of the Highways Agency wrote to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 6 November 1995, *Official Report,* columns *759–60.*

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which other countries in the *(a)* EU and *(b)* Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Department have begun operating a system similar to the national cone hotline (i) prior to, (ii) during and (iii) after the British initiative; and if he will make a statement. [8315]

Mr. Watts: In France, the Centre National d'Information Routiere operates an information line service, providing motorists with information on road conditions and the opportunity to make complaints relating to the road network. We do not have readily available details of the systems operating in other EU and OECD countries, or of the dates on which other countries' systems started.

Injury Prevention and Control

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department has signed the Melbourne declaration on injury prevention and control, adopted on 22 February. [8645]

Mr. Bowis: No.

Shipping

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many United Kingdom-owned and registered ships there were in each year since 1979.[7838]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* Information on United Kingdom-owned and registered ships alone was not available prior to 1986. The information that is available is as follows:

United Kingdom owned and registered fleet
(vessels of 500 gross tons and over)

Number of vessels at end of year

	Registered in United Kingdom		*Registered in United Kingdom or Crown Dependencies*		
	Total	*Of which owned by UK companies*	*Total*	*Of which owned by UK companies*	*Owned by United Kingdom companies*
1979	—	—	1,305	1,194	—
1980	—	—	1,275	1,143	—
1981	—	—	1,118	994	—
1982	—	—	985	868	—
1983	—	—	866	769	—
1984	—	—	777	690	—
1985	—	—	693	627	—
1986	482	454	546	496	710
1987	410	387	506	464	657
1988	375	350	482	437	621
1989	361	336	450	407	581
1990	337	310	427	378	581
1991	321	303	409	370	586
1992	291	274	363	324	555
1993	273	258	344	305	530
1994	282	263	360	310	532
1995	271	251	365	301	540
1996'	257	236	369	289	509

Note:

' At end of September.

Source:

Lloyds Maritime Information Service.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police National Computer

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the markers associated with vehicle data stored on the police national computer indicating when such markers are used. [7554]

Mr. Maclean: Details of markers associated with vehicle data stored on the police national computer cannot be divulged since to do so may be prejudicial to the prevention and detection of crime and the security of the state.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the markers associated with criminal record data stored on the police national computer indicating when such markers are used. [7556]

Mr. Howard: The following types of marker may be held for subjects with criminal record data stored on the police national computer:

Warning Signals

Information Markers

Local Cross-References.

Warning signals contain information about the subject which should be immediately communicated to officers for the protection of themselves, the subject and others.

Information markers contain useful and operationally important information about the subject.

Local cross-references are used to identify the existence of information about a subject held on other police systems.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the data fields which are currently used in relation to vehicle information stored on the police national computer. [7553]

Mr. Maclean: The following data fields relating to the vehicles application are held on the police national computer:

- Vehicle Registration Mark (VRM);
- VRM previously allocated to the vehicle;
- The Vehicle Identification Number allocated by a manufacturer;
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) make/model/body/colour code;
- Engine serial number and capacity;
- Registered owner's name and address;
- Month and year of first registration in the United Kingdom and name of the Vehicle Registration Office;
- Number and layout of wheels;
- Vehicle history:
  - permanently exported;
  - scrapped or seriously damaged;
  - previous owner has indicated they no longer own the vehicle;
  - vehicle has been subject to a cherished transfer;
  - local authority has disposed of a vehicle;
  - vehicle is subject to direct/personal export regulations;
  - lost/stolen/recovered date;
  - date vehicle was scrapped;
  - VRM has been transferred to another vehicle;
  - date on which the registered keeper last changed;
  - date when vehicle description details were last updated.
- An indicator to show that the vehicle details are as notified by the previous owner;
- An indicator to show that the contents of the DVLA record have been queried;
- An indicator to show that the vehicle excise licence has been expired for more than three months;
- An indicator to show that the vehicle owner is entitled to diplomatic privilege;
- An indicator to show whether foreign or Great Britain registered;
- Owner/creator of the vehicle details which have been entered by the police (used when no DVLA information is available).

In addition, various reports may be added by the police service to a vehicle record for operational police use. The report types available are lost/stolen, found, information, restricted—so that information is not given out over the air, correction, seen and removed, into custody or from street to street.

Criminal Records

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the data fields currently used in relation to criminal record information stored on the police national computer. [7555]

Mr. Howard: The following data fields are held for subjects with criminal record information stored on the police national computer.

Subject-related details may contain the following:

- Name under which subject is filed;
- PNC Identification Number;
- Criminal Record Office Number;
- Date and place of birth and nationality;
- Descriptive details;
- Occupations;
- Names, nicknames and dates of birth used;
- Warning signals;
- Information markers;
- Local cross-references;
- Locations of subject photographs and dates taken;
- Police circulation references;
- Police officers with detailed or special knowledge of subject:
- Passport detail;
- Other identity numbers (eg National Insurance Number, Aliens Registration Number);
- Internal cross references to other PNC subjects;
- Driver number issued by Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA);
- Known associates;
- Special skills and knowledge;
- Organisations with which subject is involved and type of relationship;
- Addresses and telephone numbers;
- Places frequented;
- Other details (any other relevant information on the subject);
- For each case the following information may be held;
- Arrest details, including date and time, prosecuting agent, fingerprint status, officer dealing with case, persons co-charged;
- Offences with which charged, including date and time, location, method used and clothing worn, whether committed while on bail;
- How, when and where the case was dealt with, e.g., conviction at court, caution at police station;
- For offences dealt with at court, the plea entered, adjudication, number of offences taken into consideration, sentence imposed, result of appeal;
- Remand appearance information including location, date, result, bail conditions and breaches of bail;
- Periods in custody including dates, institution and release details including date, reason, return/recall dates, licence conditions and supervision arrangements.

Fire Safety

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision is made for reporting back to the joint fire safety committee of the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council by Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services on their involvement, *(a)* in those areas for which the fire and emergency planning department has a policy responsibility and *(b)* in liaison with other Government Departments, in the development of fire safety standards and tests. [7978]

Mr. Sackville: The joint fire safety committee of the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council meets twice a year and on an ad hoc basis as necessary to discuss matters of particular concern to the committee. Issues affecting fire safety standards and fire testing are reported to the committee during these meetings.

Asylum Division

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff and of what grades are employed in the Home Office asylum

division; and what were the figures *(a)* on 1 January 1996, *(b)* on 1 January 1993, *(c)* on 1 January 1990 and *(d)* on 1 January 1988. [7792]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information available is given in the following table:

Grade	*1988*	*1990*	*1 January 1993*	*1 January 1996*	*30 November 1996*
5	[1]—	1	1	1	1
6	—	—	1	1	1
7	—	—	3	5	5
Senior Executive Officer	—	—	19	22	25
Higher Executive Officer	—	—	37	76	85
Higher Executive Officer (Development)	0	0	0	2	0
Executive Officer	—	—	155	268	289
Administrative Officer	—	—	203	227	190
Assistant Identification Officer	0	0	0	7	0
Administration Assistant	—	—	120	157	150
Personal Secretary	—	—	3	4	4
Total	52	86	542	770	749

[1] Indicates figures not available.

The asylum division, now directorate, was formed in April 1991. Before then, asylum determination staff were part of a division which also did other work, and the figures given for 1988 and 1990 represent the total number of staff dealing specifically with applications for asylum. No breakdown by grades of staff is available for those years.

French Fishermen (Minquiers)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Dpearmtent under what statutory provision French fishermen are permitted to fish in the Minquiers. [7764]

Mr. Sackville: The waters around the Minquiers form part of the territorial sea of Jersey. The Sea Fisheries (Jersey) Law 1994 permits continued fishing by French vessels in this area, in conformity with long-standing agreements between the British and French Governments.

CS Gas

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the value of the contingency fund that he has established to meet damages claims for injuries caused by CS gas to civilians and police officers. [8282]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend has not established such a fund.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make it his policy to incorporate the guidelines established by the Himsworth committee into authorisations given to United Kingdom police forces relating to the use of CS gas; [8280]

(2) what guidelines have been issued to United Kingdom police forces concerning the operational use of CS gas canisters; [8284]

(3) if the authorisation granted to United Kingdom police forces to use CS gas extends to members of the special constabulary; [8281]

(4) if guidelines issued by his Department to local police forces regarding the use of CS gas are legally binding. [8285]

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. and learned Friend has not issued guidelines on the use of CS spray. The Association of Chief Police Officers has issued operational guidance, which is not legally binding. Individual police officers must comply with the criminal law in relation to any use of force. The Himsworth report's conclusions and recommendations were fully taken into account in the decision to adopt CS spray, and are reflected in the operational guidance, and in guidance to chief officers on the purchase of CS equipment. It is open to chief officers to issue special constables with CS spray.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the strength of the CS gas used in the United Kingdom relative to that used in the United States of America. [8283]

Mr. Maclean: The weight to volume concentration of CS currently used by police forces in England and Wales is 5 per cent. the same as in France. I understand that some law enforcement agencies in the United States of America have used sprays with 1 to 2 per cent. concentrations, but because of concerns about its effectiveness, many have moved to pepper sprays.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many CS sprays are being acquired by United Kingdom police forces; what is the country of origin of these devices; and which companies manufacture them. [8279]

Mr. Maclean: The figure requested is not centrally available A total of 3,800 officers carried CS spray canisters for the trials which took place in 16 forces in England and Wales between March and August this year. The canisters were manufactured by SAE Alsetex of France.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of each of the CCTV schemes cited in his letter to hon. Members of 4 January; and what has been the reduction in the number of crimes in each case since the introduction of each scheme. [8239]

Mr. Maclean: The closed circuit television schemes cited are those in Newcastle upon Tyne, Swansea, Northampton, Gloucester and Bedford. None of these schemes was funded by the Home Office and details of their costs are not recorded centrally.

Local police forces have provided the following data:

Newcastle upon Tyne: The scheme became operational in December 1992. In the year before its installation, there were 12,400 recorded in the area covered by the cameras. In 1996, it is estimated that 7,000 crimes will be recorded.

Swansea: The system was installed in December 1994. In the 15 weeks before the system became operational, there were 1,544 instances of vehicle crime. In the 15 weeks after, there were 1,382 instances.

Gloucester: The system became operational in May 1993. After the cameras were installed, there was an 80 per cent. reduction in crimes of violence, a 78 per cent. reduction in commercial burglary and autocrime was virtually eradicated in car parks covered by CCTV.

Bedford: The system became operational in May 1994. In November 1993, there were 325 recorded crimes in the area covered by the cameras. In November 1996, there were 186.

Northampton: CCTV cameras have completely eradicated car crime in a local car park.

Child Abduction

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people have been arrested for attempted and actual baby snatching within the United Kingdom during the past two years in each region; and if he will make a statement; [8096]

(2) how many attempted baby snatches there have been during the past two years in each region. [8097]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not collected centrally.

Overseas Domestic Workers

Mr. Fishburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Department what estimate he has made of the number of overseas domestic workers who have entered and worked in this country legally since 1980. [8080]

Mr. Kirkhope: Comprehensive information on domestic workers admitted to the United Kingdom is not available. The available information relates to persons granted entry clearance in 1995 by the 21 posts in the middle east and far east which are likely to deal with the vast majority of applications by domestic workers. In the whole of the year, there were some 14,000 entry clearances issued at these posts to domestic workers, the great majority to servants accompanying their employers on a visit to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Fishburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of overseas domestic workers who have left their employers owing to abuse since 1980. [8081]

Mr. Kirkhope: No such estimate is available.

Green Goddesses

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Green Goddesses his Department currently has; and what is the average age of the fleet. [8216]

Mr. Sackville: The Department currently holds 1,085 Green Goddesses.

The average age is about 42 years.

Workplace (Fire Precautions) Regulations

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what meetings he or his officials have had with representatives of the retail industry and other sectors to discuss costs which may result from the proposed Workplace (Fire Precautions) Regulations. [8414]

Mr. Sackville: Officials met representatives of the British Retail Consortium on 1 August to discuss compliance costs associated with proposals for Workplace (Fire Precautions) Regulations. Since then, they have corresponded and spoken with representatives of that organisation on a number of occasions. Most recently, officials from the fire safety unit and Her Majesty's fire service inspectorate carried out cost assessment visits to workplaces with the BRC and Francis Maude, chairman of the Government's deregulation task force, on 26 November.

Representatives of other sectors were consulted as part of the consultative exercise carried out between 21 May and 9 August this year.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to implement the Workplace (Fire Precautions) Regulations; and what compliance costs have been estimated by his Department. [8415]

Mr. Sackville: Following an extensive consultation process, we intend to make regulations shortly. A compliance cost assessment will accompany the regulations.

Plastic Baton Rounds

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the police scientific development branch report, entitled "Plastic Baton Round Equipment for the Police", part 2, No. 6/90, is a classified document; and if he will place copies in the Library. [8650]

Mr. Maclean: This is a classified document and I will not place copies in the Library.

Science and Technology Group

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to place copies of all Home Office science and technology group reports in the Library. [8651]

Mr. Maclean: Copies of reports published by the former police department science and technology group, and its successor units within the police policy directorate, are placed in the Library where it is considered appropriate to do so, having regard to their subject matter and whether they are classified.

Bilingual Learners' Support

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding will be made available for bilingual learners' support in Hampshire after April 1997. [7087]

Mr. Kirkhope: The main source of specific funding for additional education support for members of ethnic minorities is grants paid by the Home Office under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966. Hampshire's grant allocation figure for 1996–97 is £527,554. I announced on 13 November, *Official Report*, column *242*, that section 11 funding will continue at its present overall level until August 1998. We are currently in touch with Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton councils about detailed arrangements in the light of local government reorganisation from April 1997. In addition, the

Department for Education and Employment currently has under consideration bids for its 1997–98 grants for education support and training programme which includes grants for in-service training to equip mainstream teachers and classroom assistants with skills needed to promote ethnic minority pupils' attainment of English. The outcome will be announced before Christmas.

Drug Dealers

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 December, *Official Report*, columns *471–72*, (1) which three-month period of 1994 was used for his analysis; how many offenders were convicted of class A drug trafficking offences in each of the three months; how many of the offenders convicted in each month had one previous offence of class A drug trafficking; how many in each month had two previous offences of class A drug trafficking; and how many in each month had more than two offences; [7850]

(2) if he will list for (i) the period of the study and (ii) the number of offenders convicted for *(a)* a first offence, *(b)* a second offence, *(c)* a third offence and *(d)* a fourth or subsequent offence of trafficking in class A drugs, and, against each category for each month, (1) the number who received a custodial sentence and (2) the average length of sentence given to those sentenced to custody. [7928]

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him on 10 December, *Official Report*, columns *148–49*.

Wiltshire Constabulary

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of *(a)* police officers, *(b)* full-time civilian staff, *(c)* part-time civilian staff and *(d)* contractors' staff employed by Wiltshire constabulary in (i) 1978, (ii) 1983, (iii) 1987, (iv) 1992 and (v) 1996. [8130]

Mr. Maclean: Information on numbers of contract staff is not held centrally. The numbers of police officers and civilians employed by Wiltshire constabulary are set out in the table:

Year[1]	Number of Police Officers	Number of Civilians Part-Time	Number of Civilians Full-Time
1978	962	227	44
1983	1,029	235	51
1987	1,044	311	69
1992	1,221	424	83
1996	1,219	414	92

[1] All figures taken at end of March.

Knives

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide the police with extra powers to arrest people found carrying a knife. [8364]

Mr. Maclean: Since 4 July 1996, the police have had the power to arrest a person found carrying a knife in a public place or on school premises. For the knife-carrying problem to be tackled effectively, we believe it is essential that the police have adequate powers to stop and search when they have reliable information that people are carrying knives. At present, a police officer may stop and search anyone if he has reasonable grounds for suspecting that he will find stolen or prohibited articles, such as a knife. *On 6 November, we announced our intention to* amend the code of practice on stop and search powers, issued under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, to make it clear that reasonable suspicion includes intelligence that members of a group or gang habitually carry knives. We have also proposed that police powers should be extended so that they can stop and search anyone in a particular area if they reasonably believe that people are carrying knives in that area. Those powers would have to be authorised by an officer of at least inspector rank for a maximum period of 48 hours. The association of Chief Police Officers, the Police Superintendents Association and the Police Federation have all indicated that they would support the proposed new powers.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much his Department will spend on Christmas trees and decorations this year; how many Christmas trees will be bought for his Department's headquarters; and what are the type and country of origin of the trees; [7571]

(2) how much his Department plans to spend on celebrating Christmas and the new year. [7586]

Mr. Howard *[holding answers 6 November 1996]:* The full information requested is not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

It is expected that Home Office expenditure on official Christmas cards will be in the region of £2,000.

Most Christmas decorations are paid for privately by members of staff. One artificial tree has been purchased for the Home Office building in Queen Anne's Gate at a cost of £75. It is being used as a focal point for a Christmas challenge to members of the Home Office to undertake voluntary work in Westminster during the Christmas season.

Metropolitan Police (Vauxhall)

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) for what reasons the plan to construct a divisional headquarters in Grafton square, Vauxhall, was not proceeded with; [8329]

(2) what plans the Metropolitan police have *(a)* to relocate and *(b)* to provide adequate modern accommodation on their present site for Vauxhall police division; [8330]

(3) what consultation has taken place within the borough of Lambeth regarding the proposed use of Grafton square as a criminal justice facility. [8331]

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that a strategic review of the provision of police accommodation in Lambeth, particularly in Clapham and Streatham, indicated that to continue with plans for a divisional headquarters in Clapham would not represent the best use of public funds.

He considers a criminal justice facility would provide greater benefit to the area. The new criminal justice facility will free much-needed space in the other police stations within the borough of Lambeth, enabling local police managers to make better use of existing police buildings. I understand that Metropolitan police architects consulted the senior planning practitioner for the London borough of Lambeth. The plans were discussed at a meeting of the Clapham sector working group and details of the drawings and proposals were sent to three local councillors. A deputy assistant commissioner from the Metropolitan police also addressed a public meeting. The Commissioner tells me that the Metropolitan police have delayed their planning application to allow more time for residents to consider the proposals.

DEFENCE

Army Radio System

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his current estimate of the cost of the Bowman project; and what was the original estimated cost. [8350]

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the original estimated cost at today's prices of the Army's Bowman radio system; what is the current estimated cost of the Bowman system; what was the original in-service date; and what is the current estimated in-service date of the system; and if he will make a statement. [8464]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The original estimated cost of the Bowman project when the first stage of feasibility studies was approved in 1988 was £1.5 billion, which is equivalent to £2.1 billion at current prices. The current estimate of the cost of the Bowman project is £1.9 billion. The original estimated in-service date was December 1995. The current estimated in-service date is March 2002.

Low Flying

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last reviewed the Royal Air Force low flying strategy; and what were his conclusions. [8466]

Mr. Soames: The need for military low flying is kept under continual review. It remains our conclusion that low flying is an essential tactic for a modern air force and one of the most effective ways of penetrating hostile air defences.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much compensation has been paid to *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations for damage resulting from flying activity in the United Kingdom in the last 10 years.[8470]

Mr. Soames: It is not possible to differentiate between compensation payments made to individuals and those made to organisations without disproportionate effort. However, the majority of payments made were to individuals.

Information on the total amounts paid is readily available for the last eight financial years only. The amounts paid relating to activity in the United Kingdom, excluding operational flying in Northern Ireland, were:

1988–89: £432,000
1989–90: £414,000
1990–91: £427,000
1991–92: £440,000
1992–93: £506,000
1993–94: £558,000
1994–95: £703,000
1995–96: £374,000.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints his Department received about low-flying aircraft in each month of each of the last four years and to date this year. [8471]

Mr. Soames: The numbers of inquiries and complaints received by my Department about military low flying by month between January 1992 and January 1996 have been provided in answers given to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 5 May 1993, *Official Report*, column *146*, 16 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *818*, 19 October 1995, *Official Report*, column *346*, and 13 February 1996, *Official Report*, column *490*. The numbers received from February 1996 onwards are as follows:

Month	*England*	*Wales*	*Scotland*
February	210	55	79
March	198	36	98
April	236	72	92
May	372	92	162
June	411	71	100
July	614	135	148
August	714	183	167
September	470	115	119
October	453	36	141
November	297	49	76

The figures exclude Northern Ireland, where most low flying is of an operational nature with only a limited number of training sorties. Complaints arising from this activity are dealt with locally, and no central record is available of the number received.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates on which military aircraft engaged in low flying exercises have crashed since January 1992. [8472]

Mr. Soames: The dates of all crashes involving British military aircraft engaged in low flying either in the UK or overseas during the period in question are listed in the table. Details of which of these aircraft were involved in exercises are not recorded separately.

15 February 1992
9 July 1992
22 September 1992
27 May 1993
28 June 1993
30 July 1993
9 September 1993
17 September 1993
21 October 1993
6 November 1993
5 January 1994
14 January 1994

23 March 1994
20 May 1994
2 June 1994
7 June 1994
8 July 1994
1 September 1994
19 September 1994
1 June 1995
20 August 1995
2 September 1995
5 October 1995
11 January 1996
23 February 1996
24 July 1996.

Nuclear Submarines (Disposal)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the disposal of the redundant nuclear submarine hulks berthed at Rosyth; what plans he has to dispose of them on land; what options he has evaluated for the dismantling and disposal of the radioactive reactors; and if he will make a statement. [8461]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) yesterday, *Official Report*, column *158*.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the decisions taken on the deployment of nuclear weapons in new NATO states at the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe meeting in Lisbon on 2 December. [8291]

Mr. David Davis: I have been asked to reply.

No such decisions were taken at the Lisbon Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe summit.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Law of the Sea Convention

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the United Kingdom plans to accede to the UN convention on the law of the sea. [8253]

Dr. Liam Fox: It is our intention that the United Kingdom will accede to the United Nations convention on the law of the sea in due course. Parliament will be told as soon as the Government have taken a decision.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom is required to accede to the UN convention on the law of the sea by the beginning of March in order to retain its right to a representative on the Commission on limits to the continental shelf. [8256]

Dr. Fox: Any state which has deposited an instrument of ratification or accession to the United Nations convention on the law of the sea on or before 5 February 1997 may nominate a candidate for election to the Commission on the limits of the continental shelf. The UK has not done so. No state has the right to a representative.

Gold Reserves (Hong Kong)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, column 308, what is the current value in pounds sterling of *(a)* the Hong Kong Government's gold reserves and *(b)* all other assets of the Hong Kong exchange fund. [8518]

Mr. Hanley: The current value of the Hong Kong Government gold reserves, held in the exchange fund, is about £15 million. The total assets of the exchange fund, excluding the gold reserves, as at end November 1996 amounted to about £39.5 billion.

Ministerial Visit (Cyprus)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to visit Cyprus; if he will meet the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders; where he will stay overnight; and if he will make a statement. [8334]

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary will visit Cyprus on 16 and 17 December and will overnight in Nicosia. We cannot give further details for security reasons. During the visit he will meet President Clerides, Foreign Minister Michaelides and the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community, Mr Rauf Denktash. Discussion will focus on the prospects of achieving a comprehensive, negotiated settlement of the Cyprus problem in 1997, before European Union accession negotiations begin.

Council of Ministers Working Group

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will name all the working groups of the European Union Council of Ministers that deal with questions of security, defence and arms control; what is the specific remit of each group and how often they meet; and if he will list the work in progress in those groups, in which the British Government participates. [8618]

Mr. David Davis: A number of working groups deal with security, defence and arms control issues. They comprise: non-proliferation, covering nuclear, chemical and biological fields; conventional arms exports; armaments policy; global disarmament and arms control. They meet regularly to discuss topical issues and areas for co-operation including, for example, the recent joint action on anti-personnel land mines. The common foreign and security policy group and Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe group also consider European security issues.

Arms Embargoes

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list the instances where *(a)* United Nations or *(b)* European Union

arms embargoes have not been immediately incorporated into the law of Britain's offshore dependencies; and what was the reason for that non-incorporation; [8624]

(2) what arrangements currently exist for the incorporation of *(a)* United Nations arms embargoes and *(b)* European Union arms embargoes into the law of the United Nations offshore dependencies; [8623]

(3) on what date the interdepartmental committee set up to examine the Government's procedures in relation to the trafficking of arms will complete its report; and when a full report will be presented to the House; [8625]

(4) what measures he has taken to prevent United Kingdom nationals or companies from supplying arms and military equipment via a third country to a destination to which such exports are prohibited under *(a)* a United Nations and *(b)* a European Union arms embargo; [8626]

(5) what arrangements currently exist for the incorporation of *(a)* United Nations arms embargoes and *(b)* European Union arms embargoes into United Kingdom national law. [8622]

Mr. David Davis: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary told the House on 27 November, *Official Report*, column *318*, the Government have set up an interdepartmental committee to examine our procedures in relation to trafficking in arms and to determine whether there has been a gap in our controls and if so what action needs to be taken. The committee's terms of reference are as follows:

To review Government controls and procedures relating to trafficking in arms from third countries to destinations subject to embargo by the UK, when this is arranged from the UK or is arranged overseas by UK nationals or by UK companies;

To determine whether there are any gaps in controls and procedures, and if so, what action needs to be taken, and to consider whether the Government should have additional powers;

For the proposes of the review, the UK shall be taken to include Crown Dependencies and Dependent Territories;

To report by Thursday 19 December 1996.

The committee is examining the scope and implementation of all current UN, OSCE, EU and national embargoes, including their application in the dependent territories and Crown dependencies. The committee will cover the issues raised by the hon. Member as fully as possible in the time available. My right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary will report to the House as early as possible.

General Affairs Council

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will report on the outcome of the General Affairs Council. [8723]

Mr. David Davis: All but three of the 25 A points in document 12425/96, which will be placed in the House as soon as it is available, were approved. The Dutch placed parliamentary scrutiny reserves on three items: stepping up the fight against organised crime; achievements in the field of justice and home affairs; and a draft report to the European Council on drugs. They expect to be able to lift all three of the reserves enabling them to be adopted before the European Council in Dublin on 13 and 14 December.

The Council noted the resolutions adopted by the European Parliament listed in document 11428/96. A copy of the document will be placed in the House as soon as it is available. The presidency drew attention to a resolution changing the European Parliament's rules of procedure requiring the Council to express an opinion on the Commission's annual work programmed and the Parliament's subsequent resolution on priorities for the year ahead. The Council agreed that this encroached on the Council's competence and that the presidency should write to the European Parliament to restate the Council's position that it did not feel itself duty bound by an obligation imposed unilaterally by the parliament.

The presidency informed the Council about the timing and agenda at the European Council in Dublin on 13 and 14 December.

The Council discussed a presidency proposal on an approach for the future trade regime for the mid-term review of the Council decision on the Association of Overseas Countries and Territories—October. Ministers were unable to reach agreement. The Council concluded that OCT should be discussed further by the Committee of Permanent Representatives with a view to reaching agreement before the end of the year.

The Council noted the approach outlined by the Commission in a short presentation given by Sir Leon Brittan on the upcoming EU–US summit which is being held in Washington on 16 December.

After hearing a report from the Commission, the Council agreed conclusions on EU relations with Switzerland. It confirmed that considerable progress had been made in various sectors and in particular in regard to the free movement of persons. While recognising that a number of technical issues remain to be resolved at expert level, the Council expressed the view that it should now be possible to proceed to the finalisation of these negotiations. The Council also expressed the hope that a rapid conclusion of the land transport agreement based on a set of common principles could be achieved. The Council also underlined the importance of the global nature of the negotiations and the need for a balance between the different sectors and a parallel shouldering of commitments in accordance with the directives approved in 1994.

The sixth EEA Council took place at the end of the morning and over lunch.

The Commission outlined its humanitarian plan for the great lakes region in Zaire. The Council encouraged the Commission to present the plan as soon as possible. There was some discussion of the need for military intervention in the support of humanitarian activities. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs commented that the British Government remain committed to the humanitarian effort in the region, but until there is clear evidence to suggest that military intervention would help the humanitarian effort, the British Government remain unconvinced of the need for deployment of a full multi-national force.

The Council had an exchange of views on Belarus, in the light of the troika's meeting with President Lukashenko in Lisbon on 3 December. The Council reiterated its deep concern about the democratic legitimacy and constitutionality of the Belarus referendum

and new constitution. It decided to propose to the Belarusian authorities the sending of a European Union fact-finding mission.

Financial assistance to Turkey under the MEDA regulation was discussed over coffee.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs debriefed the Council, at the request of the presidency, on the London peace implementation conference. He noted that, while good progress had been made, the conference had realistically identified the huge amount still to be done. The Council welcomed the successful conclusion of the London peace implementation conference. It recognised the symbolic significance of the presence of all the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the conference. The Council reaffirmed the European Union's commitment to, and support for, the consolidation of peace, reconstruction and the return of refugees, notably through its regional approach. The Council expressed its deep concern at the current developments in the former republic of Yugoslavia and called for adherence to democracy and the rule of law, respect for human rights and democratic principles. The Council underlined that this would be a factor in the development of closer relations between the European Union and the former Republic of Yugoslavia in the context of the application of the regional approach.

The Council welcomed the successful conclusion of negotiations with the Palestinians on a new interim association agreement as an important step in strengthening their relations with the European Union. It looked forward to the early signature following the planned initialling by the Commission on 10 December.

The Commission proposed 20 mecu assistance for Bulgaria through the PHARE programme as part of a concerted international effort. Detailed proposals would be put to the PHARE management committee.

Foreign Ministers held a conclave to discuss the intergovernmental conference. The Irish presidency presented the draft revised treaty outline, which the Florence European Council had requested and which was placed in the House Libraries on 5 December. Ministers were able to give their first reactions to the document in preparation for the Dublin European Council discussion on 13 and 14 December. The Foreign Ministers' meeting was preceded by the normal briefing session with the European Parliament.

The conference of the representatives of the Governments of the member states agreed that the seat of the Community plant variety office will be in Angers, France.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Irradiated Food

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the tonnage of food that is irradiated and available for sale in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [8020]

Mrs. Browning: Under the Food (Control of Irradiation) Regulations 1990 a licence holder is required to keep a record of food treated by ionising radiation.

Returns received show that approximately 25 tonnes of herbs and spices have been irradiated in the UK since 1994. All this was indented for export.

EU Fish Stocks

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if equal access for each member state to the EU's fish stocks will apply from 1 January 2003. [8301]

Mr. Baldry: At present member states do not enjoy equal access to EU fish stocks. There are restrictions on access within coastal waters and areas such as the Shetland box and Irish box. The principle of equal access is further overlaid in practice by other elements of the common fisheries policy including the operation of quotas under relative stability and the ceilings on effort in Western waters.

Under Council regulation (EEC) No. 3760/92 the Council has to decide before 31 December 2002 on any necessary adjustments to be made to the present arrangements. The Government are committed to opposing changes to introduce equal access.

Fishing (Poland)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact on the United Kingdom fishing fleet of Poland joining the EU. [8302]

Mr. Baldry: Negotiations for the further enlargement of the European Union are not scheduled to start until after the conclusion of the intergovernmental conference. Any possible impact of Polish accession on the UK fishing fleet will depend on the accession terms proposed which will be discussed in full with the industry before the Government determined their fisheries objectives for the negotiations.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

European Energy Council

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the matters discussed and decisions taken at the European Energy Council on 3 December, indicating which items were subject to votes and how the United Kingdom voted; and if he will place in the Library copies of the documents tabled at the meeting. [8255]

Mr. Page: In answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question I refer to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconfield (Mr. Smith), *Official Report*, column *30*. There were no formal votes taken at the Council. The majority of the proposals and reports have been deposited in the Library of both Houses and will appear in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*. These and other matters discussed at the Council are reported in a Council secretariat press release which is also placed in the Libraries of the House.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to change the time scale over which nuclear power stations are to be decommissioned. [8050]

Mr. Page: Decommissioning of a nuclear power station is a matter for the operator, taking into account the requirements of the regulatory authorities. This includes details of timing.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the number of industrial tribunal cases heard, the number of unfair dismissal cases heard at industrial tribunals and the number and percentage of unfair dismissal cases that were successful, by region, in each of the last 10 years. [7954]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is in the table:

Period: 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996

Region	*Bedford*	*Birmingham*	*Bristol*	*Cardiff*	*Leeds*	*London north*	*London south*	*Manchester*	*Newcastle*	*Nottingham*	*Southampton*
Cases heard: total	1,336	1,227	1,572	1,369	2,293	2,734	2,141	3,005	1,058	1,181	1,587
Unfair dismissal: cases heard (total)	701	626	737	592	1,077	1,521	1,166	1,604	548	529	835
Unfair dismissal: successful	300	228	251	216	420	509	411	695	228	200	345
Unfair dismissal: percentage successful	42.8	36.4	34	36.5	39	33.5	35.2	43.3	41.6	37.8	41.3

Period: 1 April 1994 to 31 March 1995

Region	*Bedford*	*Birmingham*	*Bristol*	*Cardiff*	*Leeds*	*London North*	*London South*	*Manchester*	*Newcastle*	*Nottingham*	*Southampton*
Cases heard: total	1,586	1,790	1,201	1,346	1,827	1,944	2,249	2,879	1,078	1,329	1,870
Unfair dismissal: cases heard (total)	881	888	694	664	1,032	1,613	1,299	1,645	555	652	924
Unfair dismissal: successful	365	346	243	194	428	509	499	729	249	271	376
Unfair dismissal: per cent. successful	41.4	39	35	30	41.5	31.6	38.4	44.3	44.9	41.6	40.7

Period: 1 April 1993 to 31 March 1994

Region	*Bedford*	*Birmingham*	*Bristol*	*Cardiff*	*Leeds*	*London North*	*London South*	*Manchester*	*Newcastle*	*Nottingham*	*Southhampton*
Cases heard: total	1,765	2,014	1,448	1,442	2,351	1,817	2,329	3,261	1,382	1,619	1,950
Unfair dismissal: cases heard (total)	1,049	1,216	803	764	1,162	1,093	1,525	1,768	751	958	1,042
Unfair dismissal: successful	504	529	381	276	490	469	703	814	379	430	455
Unfair dismissal: percentage successful	48.00	43.5	47.4	36.1	42.2	42.9	43.00	46.00	50.5	44.9	43.7

Period: 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993

Region	*Bedford*	*Birmingham*	*Bristol*	*Cardiff*	*Leeds*	*London North*	*London South*	*Manchester*	*Newcastle*	*Nottingham*	*Southampton*
Cases heard: total	1,136	1,621	1,254	1,091	1,727	1,406	1,720	2,198	1,047	1,353	1,365
Unfair dismissal: cases heard (total)	677	918	684	593	969	853	1,024	1,335	561	722	810

Period: 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993

Region	*Bedford*	*Birmingham*	*Bristol*	*Cardiff*	*Leeds*	*London North*	*London South*	*Manchester*	*Newcastle*	*Nottingham*	*Southampton*
Unfair dismissal: Successful	337	363	304	245	460	374	439	561	262	359	351
Unfair dismissal: percentage successful	49.8	39.5	44.4	41.3.	47.5	43.8	42.9	42	46.7	49.7	43.3

Period: 1 April 1991 to 31 March 1992

Region	*Bedford*	*Birmingham*	*Bristol*	*Cardiff*	*Leeds*	*London North*	*London South*	*Manchester*	*Newcastle*	*Nottingham*	*Southampton*
Cases heard: total	859	1,004	1,033	871	1,631	939	1,548	1,979	445	884	1,132
Unfair dismissal: cases heard (total)	487	561	533	488	901	546	939	947	239	453	715
Unfair dismissal: successful	261	258	205	191	424	251	368	428	127	200	330
Unfair dismissal: percentage successful	53.6	46	38.5	39.1	47	46	39.1	45.2	53.1	44.2	46.2

Offshore Oil and Gas Installations

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 31 October, *Official Report*, column *184*, on environmental inspections of oil rigs, what were the costs in each year of the oil installation inspections; and if he will place copies of the reports in the Library. [7931]

Mr. Page: As stated in that reply, figures for the numbers of inspections are not available apart from at disproportionate cost. Therefore, the costs incurred as a result of carrying out these inspections are also not available.

As files are not available, and reports may contain commercially sensitive information, copies of inspection reports will not be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what type of oil spill containment and treatment is available, and within what time span, for spills or seepages that may occur near or at the North sea and north Atlantic oil and gas platforms and depots. [7893]

Mr. Page: All oil and gas operators are required to have an oil spill contingency plan approved by my Department. In areas which are within 25 miles of the coast or are otherwise environmentally sensitive a more stringent plan for each well may be required, as may be an environmental impact assessment. These requirements are the "essential elements" and form part of the licence conditions of certain blocks. Indicative conditions are available in the Library of the House.

Telephones

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate for each of the last five years of *(a)* the number of households with a telephone and *(b)* those without by socio-economic category. [8447]

Mr. Ian Taylor: We have made no such estimate. However, figures from the family expenditure survey suggest the following:

in 1991 88.0 per cent. of households had a telephone;

in 1992 88.4 per cent. of households had a telephone;

in 1993 89.6 per cent. of households had a telephone;

in 1994–95 91.1 per cent. of households had a telephone;

in 1995–96 92.4 per cent. of households had a telephone.

We do not have figures for each of the last five years on the number of houses without a phone by socio-economic category. However, the results of the general household survey 1994 "Living in Britain" revealed that for households, the head of which was economically active, the proportion without a phone was 7 per cent. For households with economically inactive heads 12 per cent. were without a phone. A breakdown of these figures into socio-economic sub-groups is given in the survey, which is available in the Library of the House and which reveals interesting spending priorities within the categories.

Wages Councils

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent assessment he has made of the consequences of the abolition of the wages councils for wages in those industries previously covered by them. [7083]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Changes in earnings in particular industries reflect the varying conditions in those industries and it is not possible to attribute such changes to any particular event. Between April 1994 and April 1995, average earnings of full-time workers covered by the main wages councils before their abolition in August 1993 rose at a comparable rate to those of workers employed in other industries.

British Airways and American Airlines

Sir Peter Fry: To ask the President of the board of Trade what assessment he has made of the advantages and

disadvantages of the proposed British Airways-American Airlines alliance *(a)* for the United Kingdom and *(b)* for other United Kingdom carriers. [8180]

Mr. John M. Taylor: On Friday 6 December my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced that he was seeking from the alliance undertakings in lieu of a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. He made it clear that without suitable undertakings the alliance would be likely to lead to a significant loss of actual and potential competition.

The text of the competition analysis under European competition law is being made available to interested parties as from Friday 13 December 1996. I will arrange for a copy of this to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Balance of Trade

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the non-oil balance of trade in goods for the United Kingdom with the European Union in each year since 1979. [7830]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* The information is given in the table.

UK non-oil trade with the EU15

Year	*Crude balance of trade (£ billion)*
1979	–5.2
1980	–3.4
1981	–5.2
1982	–7.7
1983	–11.4
1984	–13.3
1985	–14.0
1986	–16.0
1987	–16.9
1988	–20.3
1989	–21.8
1990	–16.7
1991	–7.4
1992	–10.2
1993	–9.2
1994	–10.3
1995	–8.9

Fuel Prices

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the average pump price per litre of *(a)* petrol and *(b)* diesel in each year since 1979–80. [7824]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* The average pump price of four star petrol, premium unleaded petrol, and diesel fuel for the calendar years 1979 to 1995, and the first 10 months of 1996, including all taxes, is given in the table.

Average UK retail prices of four star petrol, premium unleaded petrol and diesel fuel for the years 1979 to 1996 in cash terms, including all taxes (pence per litre)

Year	*Four star petrol*	*Premium unleaded petrol*	*Diesel fuel*
1979	22.66	n/a	23.65
1980	28.32	n/a	29.67
1981	34.29	n/a	34.01
1982	36.62	n/a	35.86
1983	39.28	n/a	37.30
1984	40.62	n/a	38.33
1985	43.14	n/a	41.94
1986	37.35	n/a	35.60
1987	37.90	n/a	34.58
1988	37.38	n/a	33.99
1989	40.39	38.29	36.18
1990	44.87	42.03	40.48
1991	48.48	45.07	43.82
1992	50.28	46.07	45.01
1993	54.12	49.44	49.20
1994	56.87	51.58	51.53
1995	59.75	53.77	54.24
1996[1]	60.90	55.78	56.90

[1] Average for 1996 relates to the period from January to October (inclusive) only.
n/a denotes not applicable.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8537]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* For appointments made during 1995 I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Dr. Wright) on 25 April 1996, *Official Report*, column *219*. From 1 January 1996 until 6 December 1996 departmental records show that five appointments to four separate bodies were made from names first supplied by the public appointments unit. A list of the appointments is as follows:

British Shipbuilders

Mr. Christopher Campbell

Coal Authority

Mr. John Cunliffe (reappointment)

Copyright Appeals Tribunal

Mrs. Angela Howorth (reappointment)

Sir Michael Lickiss (reappointment)

Human Genetics Advisory Commission

Prof. Cairns Aitken.

SCOTLAND

Public Appointments

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many appointments to non-departmental public bodies his Department has made in each of the last five financial years; [6366]

(2) if he will list, for each of the non-departmental public bodies under the jurisdiction of his Department, how many appointments his Department is entitled to

make to these bodies; how many of these appointments will require to be made during the next *(a)* six and *(b)* 18 months; and of how many of its appointees his Department has extended the period of office during the last 12 months. [6367]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is shown in the table. This excludes appointments to advisory NDPBs, tribunals, and so on, which it would not be possible to cover except at disproportionate cost.

Executive Non-Departmental Public Body	*Number of Appointments Entitled to be Made*	*Appointments Made*					*Extensions January–December 1996*	*Appointments to be Made*	
		1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*		*January–June 1997*	*January 97–June 98*
The Accounts Commission for Scotland	15	0	3	1	5	0	1	3	6
Agricultural Research and Biological Institutes:									
Hannah Research Institute	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	2
Macaulay Research Institute	25	0	2	1	3	0	5	7	10
Moredun Research Institute	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
Rowett Research Institute	3	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	3
Scottish Crop Research Institute	20	1	3	0	0	2	0	8	15
Crofters' Commission	9	0	2	2	0	2	3	0	0
Dear Commission for Scotland	13	1	7	0	0	2	11	0	0
Highlands and Islands Enterprise	11	1	0	3	0	2	0	0	4
National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland	10	1	0	10	1	4	0	2	2
National Galleries of Scotland	12	2	1	0	1	1	2	5	7
National Museums of Scotland	15	3	0	3	2	3	2	2	6
New Town Development Corporations:									
Cumbernauld Development Corporation	8	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	3
Irvine Development Corporation	8	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Livingston Development Corporation	8	1	1	0	0	1	2	0	0
Parole Board for Scotland	16	1	1	3	6	0	2	6	8
Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh	9	0	3	0	3	0	1	4	5
Scottish Agricultural Wages Board	5	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1
Scottish Arts Council	16	0	0	0	14	0	3	10	12
Scottish Children's Reporter Administration	8	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	6
Scottish Community Education Council	10	1	0	2	2	1	3	5	7
Scottish Conveyancing and Executry Services Board	10	7	0	0	0	0	4	0	0

Executive Non-Departmental Public Body	Number of Appointments Entitled to be Made	Appointments Made 1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	Extensions January–December 1996	Appointments to be Made January–June 1997	January 97–June 98
Scottish Council for Educational Technology	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	4	4
Scottish Environment Protection Agency	12	0	0	0	0	12	0	0	0
Scottish Enterprise	11	2	1	3	0	3	4	0	1
Scottish Examination Board[1]	38	0	8	0	17	0	10	0	0
Scottish Film Council[2]	8	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0
Scottish Further Education Unit	7	0	0	7	0	1	0	3	3
Scottish Higher Education Funding Council	15	1	10	1	1	4	1	4	12
Scottish Homes	9	0	1	2	0	1	0	3	5
Scottish Hospital Endowments Research Trust	10	0	3	0	2	0	1	2	6
Scottish Legal Aid Board	13	1	4	1	4	1	3	0	6
Scottish Medical Practices Committee	6	0	0	0	2	1	0	5	5
Scottish Natural Heritage	12	1	11	0	1	3	3	3	7
Scottish Seed Potato Development Council	17	0	1	5	0	8	9	0	0
Scottish Sports Council	25	1	0	2	2	3	1	3	6
Scottish Tourist Board	7	1	1	2	1	3	0	2	2
Scottish Vocational Education Council[1]	12	1	5	0	3	0	0	0	0
Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers Council	12	0	0	0	0	12	0	1	1

Notes:

[1] The functions of the Scottish Examination Board and the Scottish Vocational Education Council will be transferred on 1 April 1997 to the new Scottish Qualifications Authority. Up to 19 appointments will be made to the new body.

[2] The functions of the Scottish Film Council will be transferred on 1 April 1997 to the new Scottish Screen. Up to 12 appointments will be made to the new body.

Landfill Tax

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the amount of landfill tax raised from waste collection authorities in Scotland for the fiscal years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98. [6827]

Mr. Kynoch: Based on their returns of household waste sent to landfill in 1994, the most recent date for which statistics are available, Scottish local authorities might be expected to face a landfill tax liability for £17 million in 1997–98. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has offset the charge on business overall by the reduction in national insurance contributions announced in his Budget last year. Scottish local authorities will benefit from this reduction.

It is not possible to estimate a figure of liability for the past year 1996–97.

Water Authorities

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much the *(a)* West, *(b)* North and *(c)* East of Scotland water authorities spent during their shadow period. [7427]

Mr. Kynoch: Between 17 July 1995 and 31 March 1996, the Scottish water authorities received grant in aid totalling *(a)* £3.211 million in the west, *(b)* £3.486 million in the north, and *(c)* £3.270 million in the east.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions have taken place between officers and Ministers of his Department and the West of Scotland water authority in relation to the construction of a sewage treatment works at Greenan; and what was the content of these discussions. [7426]

Mr. Kynoch: There have been no such discussions.

Overseas Travel (Diseases)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of rare and tropical diseases related to overseas travel have been diagnosed in each of the last five years in each health board area in Scotland. [7528]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information is not collected routinely under the category of "rare and tropical diseases". The information given in the table relates to laboratory-confirmed cases of diseases known to be of tropical origin and to cases where the disease is likely to have been of tropical origin.

Laboratory-confirmed cases[1] of disease acquired (or likely to have been acquired) in tropical countries, by health board, 1991–1995

	Year				
	1991	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Argyll and Clyde	2	0	0	6	0
Ayrshire and Arran	1	4	1	2	0
Borders	3	1	1	2	1
Dumfries and Galloway	0	2	4	2	2
Fife	1	3	1	6	2
Forth Valley	9	1	1	2	0
Grampian	22	24	20	23	34
Greater Glasgow	29	31	20	24	46
Highland	7	1	3	2	3
Lanarkshire	4	2	4	3	1
Lothian	17	23	29	40	58
Orkney	1	0	0	0	0
Shetland	0	0	0	0	0
Tayside	4	2	4	4	8
Western Isles	0	1	0	0	0

[1] From Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health. Figures relate to the health board to which notification was made, which may differ from patient's health board of residence.

Seat Belts

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* drivers and *(b)* passengers have been prosecuted for not wearing seat belts in the (i) front seats and (ii) back seats of vehicles in Scotland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [8236]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information available in relation to the prosecution of seat belt offences is as follows:

Number of prosecutions for seat belt offences, Scotland, 1990 to 1994

Year	*Number of prosecutions*
1990	1,892
1991	2,193
1992	2,689
1993	3,580
1994	4,022

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* cases and *(b)* deaths from MRSA have been recorded in (i) hospitals and (ii) the community in Scotland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [8317]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of cases of MRSA reported to the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health by laboratories throughout Scotland for each year since 1991 is given in the following table. It is not possible to distinguish between cases identified in hospitals and in the community.

Year	*Number of cases*
1991	432
1992	464
1993	442
1994	464
1995	600

Deaths due to MRSA do not have a distinct code within the revision of the international classification of diseases for encoding death registration data. Consequently, there are no centrally held statistics on deaths from MRSA.

Injury Prevention and Control

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department has signed the Melbourne declaration on injury prevention and control, adopted on 22 February. [8641]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The authors of the Melbourne declaration have not sought the Government's endorsement, although it has been brought to my right hon. Friend's attention. Accident prevention was identified as a health priority in the policy statement "Scotland's Health—A Challenge To Us All", published in 1992.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8546]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* The Scottish Office maintains its own public appointments list and therefore makes limited use of names from the public appointments unit. The Scottish Office public appointments list is used as a source of names of suitably qualified candidates for consideration for a wide range of appointments made by my right hon. Friend. From time to time, the public appointments unit passes names to the Scottish Office for the public appointments list, and vice versa. No central records are kept of the sources of names of those who are appointed to public bodies.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners' Incomes

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioner households there were in which three quarters or more of the total income was derived from national insurance retirement and similar pensions and housing and other benefits in supplement to or instead of such pensions in each of the last five financial years. [6589]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

Calendar Year	*Number of Pensioners Units*
1988	3,750,000
1989	3,750,000
1990	3,500,000
1992	3,500,000
1993	3,600,000

Notes:

1. The pensioners' incomes series gives estimates for pensioner units. A pensioner unit is defined as being either a single person over state pension age or a couple where the man is over state pension age (SPA).

2. Income from state benefits has been calculated as income from national insurance benefits and all other benefits that may be received above SPA, such as income related benefits and disability benefits.

Source:

The source of these estimates is the pensioners' incomes series, which is based mainly on data from the family expenditure survey carried out over calendar years and covers the whole of the United Kingdom. The figures given are for the last five calendar years for which pensioners' incomes series data are available, and rounded to the nearest 50,000.

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to publish new information on pensioners. [8933]

Mr. Heald: The "Pensioners' Income Series 1994/5" will be published by the Government Statistical Service at 9.30 am on 12 December. Copies will be available in the Library.

Mortgage Interest Payments

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of *(a)* the cost and *(b)* the numbers gaining if the linking period for mortgage interest payments was extended from 12 weeks to 26 weeks. [6732]

Mr. Roger Evans: No such estimate has been made and one could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

War Pensions

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 30 October, *Official Report*, columns *160–61*, if he will give a breakdown of the illnesses and diseases for which the successful claimants received a war pension; and when his Department finished compiling the final report of this special exercise. [6975]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table and relates to cases reviewed under the special exercise.

Information on the new claims made as a result of the press notice could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The special exercise was completed on 3 February 1987.

Bari Habour Exercise: Breakdown of Disablement or Causes of Death for which a War Pension was Awarded

Nature of Disability/Cause of Death	*Number of Cases*
Burns	18
Psychoneurosis	8
Injuries to eyes	8
Conjunctivitis	6
Fractures to bones	5
Injuries to limbs and spine (other than fractures)	5
Pulmonary tuberculosis	4
Amputations of lower limbs	4
Nervous disabilities	4
Loss of finger or part of finger	3
Deafness	3
Otitis media	2
Effects of gas	2
Bronchitis	2
Exhaustion	2
Concussion	1
Shock	1
Prolapsed intervertebral disc	1
Injury to face	1
Ulcers both eyes	1
Pyloric ulcer	1
Gunshot wound	1
Asthma	1
Emphysema	1
Tuberculosis	1
Pneumonia	1
Arthritis	1
Dysentery	1

Note:

In some instances awards of war pension were made to an individual in respect of more than one disability.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library the consultation papers presented to the Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions. [8666]

Mr. Heald: A copy of the consultation letter of 26 November to the members of the Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions has been placed in the Library. The letter gives full details of the proposed changes and invites comments from the committee by 17 January next year.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library the correspondence between himself and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury concerning proposals on war pensions. [8668]

Mr. Heald: Interministerial correspondence is not normally placed in the Library.

Data Matching

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he made of data matching arrangements in other countries in formulating his recent legislative proposals. [7741]

Mr. Heald: The proposals set out in the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Bill for extending checks of relevant data are based on the success of the Department's generalised matching service in identifying fraud. This was developed with the help and expertise of civil servants seconded from the privacy, fraud and control

division of the Department of Social Security in Australia, with which there is continuing contact and co-operation.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the amount which will be saved as a result of the changes to housing benefit introduced in the Budget. [8573]

Mr. Roger Evans: It is estimated that the proposed changes would save £8 million in 1997–98, £60 million in 1998–99 and £92 million in 1999–2000.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the total housing benefit budget in each of the previous five years; [8567]

(2) how much has been paid out in housing benefit for each of the previous five years. [8566]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Housing benefit is a benefit based on legal entitlement and is not subject to a budget or cash limit.

Year	*£ millions*
1990–91	5,147
1991–92	6,482
1992–93	7,901
1993–94	9,218
1994–95	10,181

Source:
Table 3, departmental report 1996.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if new claims for housing benefit for single people will be subject to the new rules introduced in the Budget when that person has previously claimed housing benefit within the last year. [8569]

Mr. Evans: A single person who had his claim assessed under the local reference rent rules will be affected by the new rules if he renews his claim after the new rules come into force. Most people who have claimed in the last year who are exempt from the local reference rent rules will also be exempt from the new rules.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of people who will *(a)* be affected and *(b)* have their benefit reduced by the changes to housing benefit introduced in the Budget. [8574]

Mr. Evans: The number of people who are likely to be affected as a result of restricting housing benefit to the local reference rent is estimated as 370,000. Of these, 40,000 are likely to have reduced benefit in the first year with 133,000 and 214,000 having reduced benefit in subsequent years.

The number of people who are likely to be affected as a result of restricting housing benefit for most single people under 60 years of age is estimated as 365,000. Of these, 72,000 are likely to have reduced benefit in the first year with 210,000 and 265,000 having reduced benefit in subsequent years.

However, the proposals will overlap and the numbers likely to have a reduction in their benefit over the next three years are 92,000, 275,000 and 370,000.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what safeguards exist in the changes to housing benefit in the budget to prevent unemployed people who are widowed or divorced and left with the tenancy of the house they previously shared with a partner from losing their homes. [8572]

Mr. Evans: There are special rules within the housing benefit regulations which give protection to those who lose their partner through death. There is also protection for those who lose their jobs. Generally, widows will be able to retain the level of benefit which was being paid before the late husband's death, for a period of 12 months. These special rules will continue to apply when the proposed changes are implemented even though claimants, over the age of 59, would not be affected by the single room rent proposals. There is no separate protection for divorced people. However, local authorities will continue to have discretion to pay up to the full rent to prevent exceptional hardship.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently claiming housing benefit in the United Kingdom. [8568]

Mr. Evans: At the end of May 1996, there were 4,779,000 housing benefit recipients in Great Britain.

I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for the Northern Ireland figure.

Note:
A recipient may be a single person or a couple.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many single person households have been in receipt of housing benefit in each of the last five years. [8570]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table.

The information relates to housing benefit recipients in all tenure types, in Great Britain, who are single with no dependants in the household.

Year	*Housing benefit recipients (000s)*
May 1991	2,346
May 1992	2,411
May 1993	2,562
May 1994	2,645
May 1995	2,702

Source:
Housing benefit management information system, annual 1 per cent. sample enquiries with and without income support, taken at the end of May in each year quoted.

Residential Home Allowances

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances the Benefits Agency is able to pay residential allowance to clients in a residential programme not registered as a residential home or mental nursing home under the terms of the Registered Homes Act 1984. [8672]

Mr. Roger Evans: Generally, income support residential allowance is payable only to persons in a registered residential care or nursing home. However, residential allowance may be paid to residents of unregistered homes, if the homes are managed or provided by a body incorporated by royal charter or constituted by Act of Parliament—other than a social services authority—and they provide both board and personal care to the customer.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 12 December 1996

TRANSPORT

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the *(a)* capital value and *(b)* expected start date of each of the private finance initiative schemes relating to transport which are summarised in table 5.5 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98" and which are expected to start in the period 1997–98 to 1999–2000. [8627]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 11 December 1996]:* The information is as follows:

	Estimated capital value (£ million)
Birmingham Northern Relief Road	300
CAA New Scottish Air Traffic Control Centre	'200
DBFO road schemes	350
London Transport Communications	150–200

' Subject to review.

Timing is subject to progress with negotiations and with approvals procedures, but most of these schemes are expected to start in 1997–98.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the estimated forward financial commitments for each signed PFI contract agreed by his Department or one of its agencies as summarised in table 5.6 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1997–98". [8620]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 11 December 1996]:* Details of individual contracts are commercially sensitive, but we estimate the average annual costs over the next three years to be around £100 million for signed design, build, finance and operate road contracts and a further £100 million for other agreed transport PFI schemes.

Trunk Road Network

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to conduct the next general review of the trunk road network. [9013]

Mr. Watts: We have no plans at present for a further general review of the trunk road network.

French Lorry Drivers Disputes

Sir Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many applications his Department has received *(a)* nationally and *(b)* from Devon and Cornwall for compensation from regular exporters of fish and fish products as a consequence of the recent French lorry drivers' dispute; and if he will make a statement. [8692]

Mr. Watts: We have had two inquiries on behalf of fishing interests, neither specific to Devon or Cornwall, about eligibility for claiming compensation and the procedure. I am not aware of any claims having yet been submitted to the French authorities.

Sir Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the criteria governing eligibility for compensation for exporters on a regular basis of United Kingdom products to the European Union following the recent lorry drivers' dispute in France; and if he will make a statement. [8708]

Mr. Watts: Any business which can demonstrate, with hard supporting evidence, that it has suffered financial loss as a direct result of the dispute is at liberty to submit a claim for compensation to the French authorities for their consideration. We shall publish shortly details of the arrangements for making claims.

Road and Vehicle Safety Directorate

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the current objectives of the road and vehicle safety directorate. [8328]

Mr. Bowis: The road and vehicle safety directorate contributes to my right hon. Friend's objectives set out in the "Transport Report 1966" and, in particular, to promoting transport safety by seeking to reduce the number of road accidents in which people are killed and injured and to reducing the adverse impact of transport on the environment through tighter vehicle standards and other measures.

Lorries (Wheel Loss)

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road fatalities arising from the loss of road wheels from heavy commercial vehicles occurred in each of the last five years; how many wheel loss incidents there were; what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into this matter; what assessment he has made of the advantages of safety wheel nuts in reducing accidents; and if he will make a statement. [8706]

Mr. Bowis: It is estimated that each year there are approximately five to six fatal road accidents involving heavy goods vehicles in which wheel detachment occurs. As data on the causation of accidents are not routinely collected by my Department, figures on the number of fatalities arising from such accidents are not available.

With regard to the number of incidents involving wheel loss each year the cases indicated by the analysis of the Vehicle Inspectorate database represent only those cases where the police have called upon an investigation to be carried out by the inspectorate.

My Department has been represented for many years on the British Standards Committee for wheels and tyres who commissioned research by the Motor Industry Research Association—MIRA—into the problems of wheel loss from commercial vehicles. This research complemented work carried out by the University of Exeter on behalf of the Institute of Road Transport Engineers—IRTE—and the Department of Trade and Industry which contributed some £35,000 to the funding.

Results of the MIRA research showed that the basic cause of the problem of wheel loss is a relaxation of the tension in the wheel fixing and that this took place regardless of whether the vehicle was moving. The British Standard code of practice for the selection and care of tyres and wheels for commercial vehicles advises that wheel fixings should be rechecked for tightness after the vehicle has been standing for 30 minutes or has travelled between 30 or 40 km. Our assessment of the engineering principle of proprietary safety wheel nuts is that they do not address the problem of this initial loss of tension of the wheel fixing and therefore do not reduce the need for regular maintenance.

Motorway Sound Barriers

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 25 November, *Official Report*, column *52*, on sound barriers on motorways, if he will now make a statement. [9182]

Mr. Watts: I have completed a review of the policy and have no changes to propose. Noise barriers have been provided on new roads and improvement schemes opened after 16 October 1969 where they offer an effective benefit to an appreciable number of properties which would otherwise have qualified for noise insulation under the Noise Insulation Regulations 1975 (Statutory Instrument No 1763), and where the cost of providing the barriers did not exceed the cost of individual insulation. For the purpose of determining whether a property would qualify for noise insulation, changes in noise level are calculated on the basis of projected traffic growth 15 years from the date of opening of the scheme.

It remains the Department's policy, subject to the availability of funds occasionally, and in exceptional circumstances, to exercise a discretionary power of improvement to provide noise barriers alongside trunk roads and motorways which were opened to traffic on or before 16 October 1969, and have not been subject to further improvement.

Subject to the availability of funds, noise barriers may be provided on such unimproved roads open to traffic on, or before, 16 October 1969 where the cost does not exceed the notional cost of insulating properties which would have qualified had the 1975 regulations applied on 16 October 1969. For these purposes qualifying properties are those which existed on 16 October 1969. The calculation of noise impact is to be based upon the assessed traffic flows at 16 October 1984. It must also be technically possible to provide effective barriers alongside the road.

This ensures equitable treatment, with respect to noise barriers, between residents living near to roads opened before and after 16 October 1969.

Seat Belts

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate how many *(a)* drivers, *(b)* front seat passengers and *(c)* back seat passengers have been (i) killed and (ii) injured as a result of not wearing a seat belt in a vehicle in Wales in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [8233]

Mr. Bowis: Statistics for seat belt wearing are available only until 1993 and only for the occupants of cars and vans. Data on front and back seat passengers are available only for car passengers. The table shows the recorded number of drivers and passengers killed and injured in Wales whilst not wearing a seat belt whether or not one was fitted. The table does not include figures for casualties where the wearing of a belt was not reported—about a quarter of all accidents.

	1991		*1992*		*1993*	
	Killed	*Injured*	*Killed*	*Injured*	*Killed*	*Injured*
Car or van drivers	15	149	11	134	9	146
Car or van passengers	24	800	15	599	10	508
Front seat car passengers	2	61	3	71	4	61
Rear seat car passengers	20	696	11	509	6	420
All van passengers	2	43	1	19	0	27

It is not known how many of these casualties were as a direct result of not wearing a seat belt.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Polystyrene (Fire Risks)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of the Secretary of State for Transport of 29 November, *Official Report*, column *418*, if he will place in the Library copies of the research undertaken by the fire research and development group and the fire research station into the fire and smoke hazards of polystyrene, together with their findings.[7812]

Mr. Sackville: I have arranged for this information to be placed in the Library.

Offenders

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the *(a)* male and *(b)* female population over the age of 30 years has committed at least one (i) minor criminal offence and (ii) serious criminal offence; and if he will make a statement. [7509]

Mr. Maclean: Information available centrally on the percentage of the population with a criminal record relates to convictions for standard list offences only. Standard list offences include all indictable offences, including those triable either way, plus the more serious summary offences. All standard list offences are considered to be serious offences.

Results from criminal histories of a sample of offenders born in 1953 indicate that 31 per cent. of males and 7 per cent. of females born in that year were convicted of at

least one standard list offence before the age of 30; and that 34 per cent of males and 8 per cent of females were convicted of at least one standard list offence before the age of 40.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the report, "A Second Exile. The Mental Health Implications of Detention of Asylum Seekers in the United Kingdom", by C. K. Pourgourides, S. P. Sashidharan and P. J. Bracken at the North Birmingham Mental Health trust; and what plans he has to implement its recommendations. [8646]

Mr. Kirkhope: Copies of this report have been forwarded to us. We cannot accept its main recommendation—that the policy of detaining asylum seekers should be abandoned—but we will take account of its detailed recommendations in taking forward detention policy.

Detention under the powers contained in the Immigration Act 1971 is used only as a last resort. Temporary admission is granted wherever possible. The primary consideration is whether a person is likely to comply with any restrictions upon him, including any arrangements for his removal from the country. Detention is unavoidable in a small number of cases if we are to retain an effective immigration control.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) how many retailers have been prosecuted for selling *(a)* lottery tickets and *(b)* scratch cards to children; and if she will make a statement; [8201]

(2) how many retailers have been prosecuted for selling *(a)* lottery tickets and (b) scratch cards to children in Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement; [8199]

(3) how many retailers have been prosecuted for selling *(a)* lottery tickets and *(b)* scratch cards to children in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [8202]

Mr. Sproat: These are operational matters for Camelot Group plc. I have, therefore, asked the Director General of the National Lottery, who is responsible for regulating the operation of the lottery, to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his response in the Library of the House.

British Academy of Sport

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will announce the names of those bids to establish and run the British Academy of Sport that are going forward to the second stage of the evaluation process. [9136]

Mr. Sproat: Thirteen of the 26 bids received to establish and run the British Academy of Sport are going forward to stage 2 of the evaluation process. The 13 bids are:

The Athletes Bid (Hertfordshire)
Bath
Birmingham West Midlands
Central Consortium (Loughborough, Nottingham, Lilleshall)
De Montford University
Houghton Grange (Huntingdon)
Kent Thameside
Manchester
Merseyside
Sheffield
Sports City Foundation (Kettering)
UK Academy 2000 (Yorkshire)
Upper Heyford (Oxfordshire).

We expect to reach a final decision in the early spring of next year.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken by the United Nations to implement and monitor the oil for food deal in Iraq under the provisions of UN resolution 986. [8652]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We welcome UN Security Council resolution 986 (1995) which took effect on 10 December. Saddam Hussein's failure to agree to implement this humanitarian gesture for over 18 months has caused the Iraqi people much unnecessary suffering. The UN in New York will monitor contracts for the export of oil from Iraq. It has appointed inspectors to monitor the export of oil from Iraq and the import of humanitarian goods. The UN has also appointed observers to ensure that there is an equitable distribution of humanitarian goods once they are inside Iraq.

European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what will be the cost to United Kingdom public funds of the establishment of a European monitoring centre for racism and xenophobia. [8671]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Discussions are continuing about the form which the European monitoring centre for racism and xenophobia should take. It is too early to estimate its likely cost to United Kingdom public funds.

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will veto plans to establish a European monitoring centre for racism and xenophobia. [8670]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: No. Agreement was reached at the Florence European Council on 21 to 22 June 1996, on the principle of a European monitoring centre for racism and xenophobia.

Human Rights

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the British Government are taking to promote the safeguarding of human rights worldwide. [8788]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: We participate actively in bodies dealing with human rights, including the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the Commonwealth. We raise human rights concerns with individual Governments bilaterally and with European Union partners.

Nuclear Disarmament

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the British Government are taking in respect of the International Court of Justice ruling of 8 July 1996, relating to nuclear disarmament. [8789]

Mr. David Davis: We do not believe that the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legality of nuclear weapons gives rise to any new factors affecting the fundamental principles of United Kingdom and NATO defence policy, including the continuing importance of nuclear deterrence in maintaining peace and stability in Europe.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Farm Woodland Premium Scheme

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the outcome of the consultation on proposed changes to the farm woodland premium scheme; and what conclusions have been reached on payment rates. [9216]

Mr. Baldry: A wide range of organisations were consulted on the proposed changes to the FWPS announced to Parliament on 24 July, *Official Report*, column *624*. Most organisations welcomed the proposed changes though there were a number of different, often conflicting views. In light of the consultation we will be making some minor modifications to our original proposals and a statutory instrument will be laid before Parliament early next year. Subject to approval by Parliament and the European Commission, it is intended that most of the proposals will be implemented with effect from 1 April 1997. A list of the changes is being placed in the Library of the House.

The rates of payment to apply from 1 April 1996 will be as follows:

	FWPS £/hectare/year	*FWS £/hectare/year*
Land eligible for Arable Area payments		
Outside of the Less Favoured Areas	300	230
Disadvantaged Areas of the Less Favoured Areas (DA)	230	180
Severely Disadvantaged Areas of the Less Favoured Areas (SDA)	160	120
Other Cropped Land and Improved Grassland		
Outside of the Less Favoured Areas	260	200
DA	200	160
SDA	140	110
Unimproved Land		
Less Favoured Areas	60	30

Where land is to count against the farmer's set-aside obligation, the payment rate will be restricted to the set-aside rate.
The FWS was closed to new applicants in 1992.

Cattle Cull

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current throughput of carcase remains from the over-30-month slaughter programme; and how many weeks it will take to clear the backlog at this rate. [7739]

Mr. Baldry: The slaughter rate of cattle under the over-30-month scheme progressively increased through the autumn to around 60,000 animals per week by the middle of November. This rate would have cleared the backlog declared by farmers as at 2 November under the Government's registration system by Christmas, but animals are not being presented for slaughter at levels consistent with the number registered.

Abattoirs have, therefore, been permitted to take both registered and unregistered OTMS animals provided priority is given to registered animals. In the week ending 8 December just over 40,000 OTMS animals were presented for slaughter against a disposal capacity of around 60,000 animals. Only half of these were registered as part of the backlog which is a good indicator that clearance has almost been achieved.

Certified Herds

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the National Farmers Union to discuss certified herds; and when he expects to bring forward detailed proposals. [8213]

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food meets the NFU regularly. These meetings cover a range of topics including certified herds. Detailed proposals are currently being drawn up. However, the progress of a certified herds scheme is dependant on whether it is decided to proceed with the selective cull.

Seafish Consumption (Seals)

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his latest estimate of the annual consumption of seafish by seals in United Kingdom waters, expressed as a proportion of the total catch by British fishing vessels in the same waters over the same period. [8178]

Mr. Baldry: The estimated number of grey seals associated with breeding sites in the United Kingdom waters in 1995 was 115,000. The Ministry does not have comparable figures of common seals, but the present population is estimated to be 28,000. Scientific work indicates that a seal can eat between 1.4 and 1.8 tonnes of fish each year. Current seal numbers may thus have accounted for between 200,000 and 260,000 tonnes of fish. It is not possible to draw a direct comparison with landings from the United Kingdom fleet, since seals mostly eat species which are not consumed by humans.

TREASURY

Bank of England (Archive Material)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to ensure that the Bank of England releases all of its archived papers and documents for the year 1966 before the end of the year. [8353]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Although the Bank of England is not subject to the Public Records Acts, it has as a matter of policy released archived papers after 30 years. Papers relating to 1996 will be made available on 1 January 1997.

Privatised Companies (Individual Shareholders)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage of shares held by individuals in privatised companies *(a)* on privatisation and *(b)* as at the most recent date for which figures are available. [8215]

Mr. Jack: The following table gives the information requested in part *(a)* for major primary sales. The present size of share registers is a matter for the companies themselves and their registrars and may be found in individual companies' annual reports.

Shares sold in the public offer (as a proportion of total shares sold in the offer)

Offer	*Year*	*Actual proportion allocated (per cent.)*
BT	1984	34
British Gas	1986	64
British Airways	1987	47
Rolls Royce	1987	42
BAA	1987	52
British Steel	1988	42
Water	1989	47
Regional Electricity Companies	1990	55
Generating Companies	1991	49
Scottish Electricity	1991	58
N. Ireland Electricity	1993	64
Railtrack	1996	[1]51
British Energy	1996	[2]52

[2] Includes Retail Tender.

Long-term Care Insurance

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to consult on how to regulate the selling and marketing of long-term care insurance. [9135]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The Government's consultation document, "A new partnership for care in old age", published on 7 May, invited comments on a proposed partnership scheme to provide extra protection from the means test for residential care to people who took out a "partnership product" to meet some of the costs of long-term care. Views were also invited on whether the selling and marketing of partnership insurance products, and long-term care insurance more generally should be regulated under the Financial Services Act 1986.

I informed the House on 24 July 1996, *Official Report*, column *549*, that the responses to the consultation suggested a consensus in favour of regulation under the FSA, covering the marketing and selling of all long-term care insurance products, but that before a decision was taken the Treasury would explore further the detailed question of how this should be achieved, and would issue a consultation document seeking the views of interested groups. The Treasury has today published a consultation document which fulfils that undertaking. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The document explains the Treasury's detailed proposals to regulate the selling and marketing of long-term care insurance under the FSA, and includes a draft statutory instrument which would achieve this. Comments are invited from anyone interested. The end of the consultation period will be announced in the new year when the Government's policy statement on other aspects of its plans to take forward the proposals in "A new partnership for care in old age" is made.

Paymaster Agency

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will report progress with the privatisation of the Paymaster agency. [9183]

Mr. Oppenheim: Initial bids have been received and three bidders have just been short-listed. These are the management and employee buy-out team in partnership with ITNet, Capita Managed Services, and EDS/Hogg Robinson Financial Services Ltd. Final bids are due in by mid-January.

European Union Budget

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Council of Ministers has adopted the letter of amendment No. 2 to the preliminary draft general budget of the European Union for 1997. [9184]

Mr. Oppenheim: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 5 December, *Official Report*, columns *744–46*. The Council adopted the letter of amendment No. 2 to the preliminary draft general budget of the European Union for 1997 at its meeting on 19 November. It has now been passed to the European Parliament as the letter of amendment No. 2 to the draft general budget of the European Union for 1997.

In agreeing this proposal I waived the United Kingdom's scrutiny reserve. I did so because the letter of amendment No. 2 formed an integral part of a package with which the Council aimed to secure the European Parliament's agreement to a budget for 1997 in which total payments would be frozen at 1996 levels in cash terms. Such an outcome would clearly be in the national interest.

Self-assessment

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the number of taxpayers who will face penalties for late return of self-assessment forms; and what is the expected annual yield from such penalties in each of the next three years. [8275]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* The Inland Revenue's current working assumption is that 15 per cent. of taxpayers will file their self-assessment tax return later in the first year of the new system, reducing to 10 per cent. in the third year. These figures are based on current taxpayer behaviour, and do not take into

account the deterrent effect of late filing penalties or publicity around the filing dates. The automatic penalty for those who do not file by 31 January 1998 will be £100. No estimates have been made of the annual yield from late filing penalties.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what criteria the United Kingdom will propose to govern the choice of the members of the board of the European Central Bank; and if he will take steps to ensure that the Nolan committee's recommendations relating to public appointment will apply to these appointments. [6807]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Article 11 of the Statute of the European System of Central Banks–ESCB—annexed to the EC treaty states that the executive board of the European Central Bank—ECB—shall comprise the president and vice-president of the ECB and four other members. It states that the

"President, the Vice-President and the other members of the Executive Board shall be appointed from among persons of recognised standing and professional experience in monetary or banking matters",

by common accord of Governments at the level of Heads of State or Government, on a recommendation from the Council after it has consulted the European Parliament and the Governing Council of the ECB. In accordance with article 43.3 of the statute and paragraph 8 of protocol No. 11, member states which do not participate in the single currency are not involved in this procedure and nationals of these countries may not be members of the executive board. Article 50 of the statute provides for some transitional procedural rules to govern the section of the executive board when it is established.

The second paragraph of article 11.1 of the statute states that members of the executive board shall

"perform their duties on a full-time basis. No member shall engage in any occupation, whether gainful or not, unless exception is exceptionally granted by the Governing Council".

Article 7 of the statute provides that no member of the executive board, as a decision-making body of the ECB,

"shall seek or take instructions from the Community institutions or bodies, from any government of a Member State or from any other body".

Article 11.4 of the statute states that

"If a member of the executive board no longer fulfils the conditions required for the performance of his duties or if he has been guilty of serious misconduct, the [European] Court of Justice may, on application by the Governing Council or the Executive Board, compulsorily retire him".

If the United Kingdom were to participate in the single currency and were therefore involved in the selection of the executive board, the Government would want to be confident that members of the executive board would be able to meet the obligations imposed on them by the treaty, including the statute of the ESCB. The Nolan report relates to public life in the United Kingdom.

ENVIRONMENT

Emission Targets

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action the United Kingdom is taking to ensure that significant emission reduction targets are put forward at the Geneva intersessional conference on climate change in December. [8052]

Mr. Clappison: The United Kingdom proposed, at the first conference of the parties to the climate change convention in Berlin in 1995, that developed countries should agree to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases to between 5 per cent. and 10 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010.

We expect this proposal to influence negotiations, including at the convention meeting taking place in Geneva this month, which will lead to an agreement on new commitments at the third conference of the parties in Kyoto, Japan in December 1997.

Building Research Establishment Conservation Support Unit

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those recommendations produced by the consultants for BRECSU which were subsequently not published, indicating the factors underlying their non-publication. [8254]

Mr. Clappison: BRECSU is one of the Department of the Environment's managing contractors for its energy efficiency best practice programme. In this role, it has placed some 600 contracts with a range of organisations. The reports submitted by the contractors are used, together with other consensus knowledge and expertise, to produce a wide range of best practice publications in the buildings and related energy management fields.

Radioactive Waste (Sellafield)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in the attempts by the Environment Agency, as a successor to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, to secure the release of the safety reports relating to the proposed subterranean repository for radioactive waste near Sellafield; and if he will make a statement on the current working relationship between Nirex and the Environment Agency. [8610]

Mr. Clappison: Following my written answer to the hon. Member on 11 November, *Official Report* column *3* UK Nirex Ltd. has provided the Library with a list of its research reports. Until Nirex applies to the Environment Agency for authorisation under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 to dispose of radioactive waste, there is no formal regulatory relationship between the company and the Environment Agency. However, discussions are currently taking place between the two organisations about their future working arrangements.

Rent Rebates

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the additional rent rebate expenditure incurred by local authorities as a result of the application of his guideline rent increases for each year from 1990–91 to 1995–96. [8872]

Mr. Clappison: The guideline rent increases produced gross public expenditure savings which offset the additional cost of rent rebates. The estimated rent rebate expenditure if all authorities had increased their rents in line with the guideline rent increases for each year from 1990–91 to 1995–96 and the estimated gross savings from the extra rent income are:

£ million

	Additional rent rebate expenditure each year	Additional rent income each year
1990–91	255	420
1991–92	224	364
1992–93	295	462
1993–94	268	401
1994–95	266	405
1995–96	272	405

Estate Action

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the level of continuation funding in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 for each estate action scheme (i) in London and (ii) nationally. [8849]

Sir Paul Beresford: Within the single regeneration budget planned provision nationally for the remaining estate action commitments is currently as follows:

	£ million
1997–98	170
1998–99	98
1999–2000	61

SRB allocations to each region for 1997–98 for continuing programmes, including estate action, will be determined shortly, following last month's Budget statement. The Government offices in each region then manage their total SRB allocation and have flexibility to vire between programmes where necessary, in order to ensure that all existing estate action commitments continue to be honoured. Regional SRB allocations for subsequent years will be determined by the outcome of future public expenditure surveys.

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of state for the Environment what allowance he made for inflation in determining estate action allocations in *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994; and if he will make statement. [8850]

Sir Paul Beresford: Local authorities were advised to make due allowance for inflation before submitting their bids for estate action support to the Department. The amounts available to fund new and continuing estate action schemes in 1993–94 and 1994–95 were determined by the public expenditure survey settlements.

Capital Challenge

Mr. Austin Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide *(a)* a breakdown for each region of the source of the resources to finance capital challenge and *(b)* a breakdown of the bids received from each region. [8851]

Sir Paul Beresford: *(a)* Each Government Department has contributed to capital challenge in proportion to their share of the Government's total provision for local authority capital expenditure. Since total provision is not sub-divided on a regional basis, it is not possible to break down each region's share in the manner requested.

(b) For each service and region, the attached table shows the total value of all bids and the credit approvals sought.

Capital challenge—all bids—total bid cost and credit approvals bid for—by service and by region

(£,000)

Service	North East	Yorkshire and the Humber	East Mids	Eastern	South East	London	South West	West Mids	North West	Merseyside	Totals
Total bid cost—by service—all bids											
Education	7,595	35,639	27,013	36,964	27,297	76,819	17,566	57,493	46,127	19,909	352,422
Housing	23,604	60,145	31,326	40,156	70,327	170,478	29,331	159,947	123,053	4,940	713,307
Personal Social Services	6,502	4,370	6,595	11,397	7,899	14,865	5,328	6,915	11,034	3,216	78,121
Transport	39,579	182,490	25,674	92,584	157,730	77,605	45,551	114,162	191,470	79,422	1,006,267
Magistrates' Courts	245	7,727	11,614	6,126	210	23,596	22,000	2,516	306	0	74,340
Fire and Civil Defence	3,360	7,270	1,310	40	5,120	13,670	12,296	4,983	7,700	5,528	61,277
Probation Service	0	0	75	6	90	2,086	4,976	1,327	0	2,261	10,821
Coastal Prot'n, Flood Defence	0	0	0	550	13,338	0	2,125	1,040	0	0	17,053
Sport and Recreation	34,180	29,484	34,225	9,287	220,802	15,416	25,868	16,405	65,183	3,002	453,852
Other Services	67,466	29,843	43,154	76,319	216,609	228,222	226,324	193,422	238,052	24,032	1,343,443
Totals	182,530	356,968	180,986	273,429	719,422	622,757	391,365	558,210	682,925	142,310	4,110,902
Credit approvals bid for—by service—all bids											
Education	7,005	29,111	21,886	18,952	16,306	46,313	10,181	32,472	28,385	14,074	224,685
Housing	8,820	32,098	8,381	21,678	10,897	79,433	11,222	53,164	39,628	500	265,821
Personal Social Services	3,215	3,055	3,835	16,371	3,132	8,636	3,997	5,970	8,024	2,080	58,315
Transport	26,756	52,519	29,021	29,179	90,751	39,329	34,403	66,402	48,448	36,442	453,250
Magistrates' Courts	245	7,727	11,614	6,031	210	23,591	7,200	2,516	306	0	59,440
Fire and Civil Defence	3,346	7,270	660	20	4,720	13,545	12,246	4,698	7,700	5,527	59,732
Probation Service	0	0	75	6	0	1,776	3,101	1,327	0	2,261	8,546
Coastal Prot'n,	0	0	0	275	0	0	1,000	200	0	0	1,475

Capital challenge—all bids—total bid cost and credit approvals bid for—by service and by region

(£,000)

Service	*North East*	*Yorkshire and the Humber*	*East Mids*	*Eastern*	*South East*	*London*	*South West*	*West Mids*	*North West*	*Merseyside*	*Totals*
Flood Defence	2,769	4,830	6,993	1,193	21,870	4,501	1,512	8,144	7,218	302	59,332
Sport and Recreation	11,839	20,740	20,151	18,151	62,284	65,071	38,056	39,473	50,520	5,117	331,402
Other Services	63,995	157,351	102,616	111,856	210,170	282,195	122,918	214,366	190,229	66,303	1,521,999
Totals											

Resource Allocation (London)

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost compensation factor used in determining resource allocation for London in *(a)* the generalised needs index, *(b)* the single regeneration budget and *(c)* capital challenge; and what plans he has to amend the allocation. [8852]

Sir Paul Beresford: *(a)* The generalised needs index, which is used in the distribution of housing annual capital guidelines for local authorities in England, uses regional cost compensation factors to reflect the different costs of capital works in different parts of the country. There were separate factors for the new provision and renovation parts of the index.

Relative cost compensation factors are calculated for each region and the factors are scaled so that the factors for the lowest regions equal 100. The cost compensation factors for London used in the GNI for 1996–97 were 155 (new provision) and 137 (renovation); the figures for other regions range between 100 to 130 and 100 to 114 respectively. The methodology underlying the cost compensation factors, which are updated annually, was reviewed in detail in 1995.

(b) Cost compensation factors are not used in determining the indicative regional allocations for the single regeneration budget challenge fund. Individual bids for resources are based on forecast actual costs, and so should take account of any regional variations in prices.

(c) The apportionment amongst regions of the sums available under the capital challenge pilot scheme is based on each region's share of the national total of local authorities' annual capital guidelines, supplementary credit approvals and capital grants for all services. It takes no account of a cost compensation factor except in so far as it is included in the housing ACG as discussed above.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Cameroon

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received with regard to the environmental impact of World bank-funded transport projects in the Cameroon. [8411]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Friends of the Earth wrote to my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker on 6 September expressing concern about the possible environmental impact of this programme. The ODA acknowledged the possible risks but pointed out that the World bank was working with the Government of Cameroon to ensure that environmental impact was considered when individual projects were being selected.

Iraq

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts are being made by Her Majesty's Government to enable the Save the Children Fund to enter northern Iraq. [8654]

Dr. Liam Fox: We understand that two members of Save the Children Fund have recently entered northern Iraq.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British aid agencies are operating in *(a)* northern Iraq and *(b)* Iraq. [8653]

Dr. Fox: As far as we are aware there are eight British non-governmental organisations operating in northern Iraq and one in Baghdad-controlled Iraq.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which British aid agencies are being denied access to northern Iraq. [8655]

Dr. Fox: The usual route for western NGOs carrying out humanitarian work in northern Iraq since 1991 has been via Turkey. The Turkish Government introduced new requirements in August, since when no British NGOs have been given authority to travel into northern Iraq from Turkey. We have raised this on several occasions with the Turkish Government, urging them to allow reputable British NGOs, who have complied with their new requirements, to enter northern Iraq.

Zambia

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of human rights in Zambia. [8737]

Dr. Fox: Our high commission closely monitors respect of human rights in Zambia. We welcomed the recent legislation establishing a human rights commission but we were concerned that two non-governmental organisations' leaders were questioned by police on 24 November following their reports on the recent elections.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received about the current internal political situation in Zambia. [8736]

Dr. Fox: We receive regular reports from our high commission at Lusaka. There have been no reports of any civil unrest since the presidential and parliamentary elections which were held on 18 November. The current internal political situation is stable.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the budget of the Immigration Appellate Authority in the financial year 1996–97; and what it was in financial years *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1994–95. [7793]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Doug Henderson, dated 12 December 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the budget of the Immigration Appellate Authority.

In 1994/95 the Immigration Appellate Authority spent £6,965,344 and in 1995/96 this rose to £8,404,699. The current estimate of the expenditure for the financial year 1996/97 is £9,917,983.

I can confirm that these figures include both tribunal staff and judicial salaries; they do not include any provision for accommodation expenditure.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time special adjudicators were employed by the Immigration Appellate Authority *(i)* at the latest available date, *(ii)* on 1 January 1995 and *(iii)* on 1 August 1993. [7785]

Mr. Streeter: At the latest available date, 6 December 1996, 29 full-time and 97 part-time immigration adjudicators were designated as special adjudicators by the Lord Chancellor. On 1 January 1995 there were 18 full-time and 44 part-time immigration adjudicators who were so designated. On 1 August 1993 there were 16 full-time and 15 part-time immigration adjudicators so designated.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many appeals against a refusal of asylum are currently outstanding; and what was the number on *(a)* 1 January 1996, *(b)* 1 January 1995 and *(c)* 1 January 1994. [7786]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Doug Henderson, dated 12 December 1996.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of outstanding asylum appeals.

As at the end of November 1996 there were 20,388 appeals outstanding. This compares with 11,691 at the beginning of 1996, approximately 3,400 in January 1995 and 1,069 in April 1994.

Legal Aid

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the eligibility for legal aid of young people who are suing local education authorities over their school education. [7779]

Mr. Streeter: In addition to qualifying financially, an applicant must also show to the Legal Aid Board that he or she has reasonable grounds for taking, defending or being a party to proceedings, and that it is reasonable in the particular circumstances of the case for legal aid to be granted. However, I should make clear that, as yet, the Legal Aid Board has not yet received any applications for legal aid in the case relating to educational achievement, which was recently reported in the press.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent representations he has received from the Bar Council on the subject of reform of the legal aid budget; and if he will make a statement. [7915]

Mr. Streeter: I recently met the chairman of the Bar Council to discuss the reforms. I look forward to having further discussion and consultations with the Bar and other interested bodies as the reforms progress.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many certificates issued by the Legal Aid Board were revoked in (i) 1992, (ii) 1993, (iii) 1994 and (iv) 1995; and if he will make a statement. [7907]

Mr. Streeter: The number of civil legal aid certificates revoked in each year was as follows:

1992–93: 11,630

1993–94: 19,503

1994–95: 21,773

1995–96: 25,032.

The figure for 1992–93 represents revoked emergency certificates only because revoked substantive certificates were not recorded on the Legal Aid Board's case administration computer system until 1993–94. The 1993–94 figure does not include substantive revoked certificates for Cardiff as that office was not upgraded with the new computer system until August 1994.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in how many cases in the past six months claims for legal aid to pursue civil claims for compensation in cases involving *(a)* criminal harassment by landlords, *(b)* illegal eviction and *(c)* disrepair have been refused; and how many of these claims have been granted on appeal. [7800]

Mr. Streeter: The information requested is not available as the data gathered by the Legal Aid Board do not separately identify those categories of cases.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he last met the Law Society to discuss the provision and funding of legal aid; and if he will make a statement. [7916]

Mr. Streeter: The Lord Chancellor, I and officials in my Department regularly meet representatives of the Law Society to discuss a very wide range of issues relating to the provision and funding of legal aid.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the 20 *(a)* solicitors firms and *(b)* barristers who have received the largest sums of money from the legal aid scheme for each year for which information is available. [8700]

Mr. Streeter: In the time available it has not been possible to provide the information requested. I will reply as soon as possible.

Molestation

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the advantages of statutory tort of molestation following the Court of Appeal judgment in the Burris *v.* Azadani case in July 1995. [7795]

Mr. Streeter: The consultation paper, "Stalking—the Solutions", which was published by the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department in July 1996, discussed the question whether there should be a statutory tort of molestation or whether cases of molestation should be dealt with under the common law, in the light of recent cases. Its conclusion, that there should be a statutory tort, was supported on consultation and the Protection from Harassment Bill, which was introduced on 5 December, accordingly contains a statutory tort.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 December. [7453]

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

War Pensions

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister if he will now publish in the *Official Report* the ministerial correspondence and discussion papers that led to the change in rules for the award of war pensions for deafness and pension increases for further deterioration. [8728]

The Prime Minister: The texts of the address and the background note given to members of the Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions about the change in medical opinion regarding the interaction between service-related noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss and subsequent hearing loss have been placed in the Library. Inter-ministerial correspondence and discussion papers leading up to a change are not normally published.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Modern Apprenticeships

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list *(a)* the planned timetable, *(b)* the planned number participating and *(c)* the estimated public expenditure for the introduction of modern apprenticeships in each Government Department. [8840]

Mr. Freeman: The use of modern apprenticeships is a decision taken by individual Government Departments. Information on take-up in the civil service is not held centrally. Departments are actively encouraged to consider modern apprenticeships as part of their human resource strategies to develop future managers and encourage lifetime learning.

Fire Safety

Sir Donald Thompson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what cost compliance assessment has been undertaken of the proposed Workplace (Fire Precautions) Regulations by the deregulation unit. [8345]

Mr. Freeman: The Workplace (Fire Precautions) Regulations are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. Earlier proposals for implementing the directives had significant costs associated with them which had led us to adopt a new approach, recognising the high standards of fire safety that already exist in workplaces. The Home Secretary undertook a further public consultation during the summer on a revised draft of these regulations, which, amongst other issues, specifically sought advice from business on compliance costs. The Home Office is currently preparing a compliance cost assessment which will accompany the proposed regulations.

Sir Donald Thompson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment the deregulation task force has made of the introduction of the proposed Workplace (Fire Precautions) Regulations; and what meetings he has had with business representatives to discuss their possible compliance costs. [8344]

Mr. Freeman: The Workplace (Fire Precautions) Regulations are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. The deregulation task force commented on the Government's proposed approach in its 1995–96 report. The Home Secretary undertook a public consultation during the summer on a draft of these regulations, and members of the task force have since provided views on the draft regulations. My noble Friend Baroness Blatch, Minister of State at the Home Office, and I are also discussing compliance costs for these regulations with the British Retail Consortium with whom yesterday we visited some premises.

Sir Donald Thompson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made of the efficiency scrutiny report on the implementation and enforcement of EC law in the United Kingdom in respect of its fire safety provisions. [8343]

Mr. Freeman: The recommendations on fire safety issues were largely taken forward in the later fire safety scrutiny, the Government's response to which was announced on 21 May 1996, *Official Report*, column *100*. The Government have also acted upon the two recommendations relating to examination by fire service inspectors of complaints about enforcement action and encourage of fire authority participation in local business partnerships.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to her answer of 14 November, *Official Report*, column *342*, if she will list individually those national vocational qualifications accredited at 30 June that *(a)* had not attracted full awards and *(b)* had attracted fewer than 100 awards. [6971]

Mr. Paice: The information requested is contained in a number of tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library. As I said in my answer of 14 November, individual vocational qualifications are subject to accreditation at regular intervals and, given the time it takes after accreditation for awards to become available to centres, and individuals to train towards them, at any one time a considerable proportion of individual NVQs will have attracted few awards. Only about a quarter of the titles listed had an award accredited before 1994.

European Social Fund Bid

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will submit a programme under objective 4 of the European social fund for 1997 to 1999. [8552]

Mr. Paice: Yes.

Education Spending

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the proportion of gross domestic product spent on education in each Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country in the last 10 years. [8557]

Mr. Paice: The information requested for those OECD countries for which data are available is shown in the table. The figures given are based on information provided by each country to OECD for its latest edition of "Education at a Glance", published on 9 December. Copies of "Education at a Glance" will shortly be available in the Library.

Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP, 1984 to 1993

	1984	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
North America										
Canada	7.2	6.9	7.0	6.9	6.8	6.2	6.2	6.7	7.2	6.9
Mexico	3.9	3.8	3.5	3.3	3.3	3.6	4.0	4.5	4.9	4.1
United States	4.6	4.6	4.8	4.8	4.9	5.0	5.2	5.5	5.4	5.2
Pacific Area										
Australia	5.4	5.4	5.3	5.1	5.5	n/a	4.6	4.7	5.5	5.6
Japan	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.6
New Zealand	4.7	5.1	5.8	5.9	6.1	n/a	n/a	n/a	6.5	6.7
European Union										
Austria	5.8	5.8	6.0	5.9	5.6	5.5	5.4	5.6	5.8	5.5
Denmark	n/a	6.2	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	6.3	n/a	n/a	6.6
Finland	5.5	5.7	5.7	5.8	5.7	5.7	6.0	6.1	8.3	7.9
France	5.7	5.7	5.7	5.6	5.5	5.1	5.1	5.4	5.5	5.7
Germany	4.6	4.6	4.5	4.4	4.3	4.2	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.8
Greece	3.8	4.0	3.8	3.8	3.4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	3.5
Ireland	6.0	6.0	6.3	6.2	5.4	5.1	5.0	5.2	5.5	5.6
Italy	5.1	5.0	5.0	4.8	4.9	5.0	5.2	n/a	5.1	5.1
Netherlands	6.6	6.6	6.7	6.9	6.1	5.7	5.7	5.6	5.6	5.4
Portugal	4.0	4.0	4.3	4.1	4.2	4.0	4.3	5.5	n/a	5.4
Spain	3.4	3.6	3.6	3.7	3.9	4.2	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.7
Sweden	7.2	7.0	7.0	6.9	6.5	5.4	5.6	6.5	7.7	7.7
United Kingdom	5.2	4.9	4.9	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.9	5.3	5.2	5.1
Other OECD countries										
Czech Republic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	4.2	n/a	n/a	6.0
Norway	5.8	5.6	5.5	5.6	5.7	7.0	n/a	6.8	n/a	9.0
Switzerland	5.2	5.1	5.2	5.2	5.0	n/a	5.2	5.4	5.7	5.8

Notes:
Vertical bars indicate a break in the series.
n/a= Data not available.
Source:
Data supplied to OECD by individual countries for the publication "Education at a Glance", OECD December 1996.

Employment Schemes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people after attending (1) employment rehabilitation service, (2) Employment Service services, (3) employment training, (4) the employment transfer scheme, (5) the free forward fares scheme, (6) industrial training boards, (7) job clubs, (8) the job creation programme, (9) the jobfinder's grant, (10) the job interview guarantee, (11) the jobmatch scheme, (12) the jobplan workshop, (13) the job review, (14) the job release scheme, (15) job review workshops, (16) the job start scheme, (17) the jobseeker's allowance, (18) the job share programme, (19) the job splitting scheme, (20) the job training programme, (21) learning for work, (22) job seminars, (23) local enterprise agencies, (24) Manpower Services Commission, (25) non-advanced and work-related further education, (26) new job training scheme, (27) the national policy skills scheme and (28) national record of achievement *(a)* went into employment

and *(b)* went on to further schemes, including those who left before completion of the scheme, in each year of each scheme's operation; and what type and level of qualification each leaver obtained for each year to the latest available year for which data are available. [8738]

Mr. Paice: The information requested can be provided only at a disproportionate costs.

Liverpool Blue Coat School

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she expects to announce confirmation of the schedule 5 enactment in respect of the grant-maintained status of the Liverpool Blue Coat school; and if she will make a statement. [8871]

Mr. Robin Squire: Liverpool local education authority has requested that the Secretary of State declares void the ballot for grant-maintained status in respect of the Blue Coat school. No decision on grant-maintained status can be made until the investigation into the ballot complaint has been completed. That investigation will be completed shortly.

Project Work

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress she has made on extending the project work pilots; and if she will make a statement. [9272]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In November I announced my plans to extend the project work approach to 28 new pilot areas across the country, covering up to 100,000 people, and to test a number of variations on the basic model. A list of the locations and start dates of the new pilots is contained in the following table.

We will be piloting variations to the approach used in Hull and Medway and Maidstone to see whether we can improve its effectiveness. There will be an emphasis on literacy and numeracy in all the new pilots. Up to 10,000 people will have access to intensive help with literacy and numeracy. A further 9,000 people will be covered by pilots where we will be seeking increased involvement of the private sector. In pilots covering around 14,000 people, workstart will be replaced by jobmatch as an additional programme available to people in the pilot. Jobmatch offers grants to people who take part-time jobs as a stepping stone into full-time work. The results from the jobmatch pilots currently running have been encouraging, and we want to see whether jobmatch is a more cost-effective addition to the help available to project work participants than workstart. We will also test the added value of workstart by removing it altogether in some pilots. In other pilots we will be varying the length of the initial period of jobsearch help for around 13,000 people.

Through these pilots, we will provide a package of specialist help and advice for people who have been out of work for a long time and face significant disadvantages. I believe that these pilots are an innovative and useful addition to the help that we already provide for unemployed people.

Type of pilot	*Starting date*	*locations piloting this type*
Basic model	February 1997	Dudley and Sandwell Nottingham Bristol Bath Weston-super-Mare North East London Derby Hull Medway and Maidstone
Intensive literacy and numeracy help	April 1997	Bradford Huddersfield Norwich Dundee Stoke
Increased private sector involvement	April 1997	Hertford and Harlow Peterborough Edinburgh Portsmouth
Differences in length and content of the intensive help prior to mandatory work experience	February 1997 (full range of ES help excluding Workstart)	Bolton and Bury Swansea Neath and Port Talbot Merthyr and Rhymney Preston Lanarkshire
Variation including Jobmatch	February 1997 (full range of ES help including Jobmatch)	East London Wigan and St. Helens
Variation with period A shortened to 8 weeks	April 1997 (8 week period of intensive help)	Brighton South Tyneside
Variation with period A shortened to 4 weeks	April 1997 (4 week period of intensive help)	Leicester Grimsby Dunfermline

Contract for Work

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress she has made on the contract for work pilot; and if she will make a statement. [9271]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In November I announced that the Department would be introducing pilots to explore ways in which the talent for innovation of the private sector might be used to help unemployed people back to work. The Chancellor announced in his Budget speech that these pilots would be called contract for work.

The aim of the pilots will be to test the cost effectiveness of the private sector in getting long-term unemployed people back to work and to test specific approaches to that task. The pilots will have an incentive-based funding structure which rewards success.

There will be two private sector contract for work pilots, each covering around 3,000 people. Another 6,000 people will be placed on programmes run by the Employment Service, to provide an additional measure against which the performance of the private sector can be judged. The pilots will last for 12 months and participants will be referred to them for a maximum of six months. The pilots will start in the spring and invitations to tender should be issued by mid-February.

On locations for the pilots, I have decided that the private sector interest should be explored across four major cities, including Manchester, London, Glasgow and Birmingham. A final decision will be made according to the quality of bids received. Before invitations to tender are issued, my officials will initiate a series of discussions with a range of organisations to draw on their expertise and experience in considering detailed design issues.

Through these pilots we will provide an opportunity for the long-term unemployed to work directly with the private sector, an approach which I hope will be mutually beneficial. I believe that these pilots will be a welcome and necessary addition to the help that already exists for unemployed people.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of the Government funding for the training and enterprise councils was represented by the salaries of their chief executives in the last year for which figures are available. [8424]

Mr. Paice: The information requested is not available. However, in line with other private companies, training and enterprise councils are required to provide information about their funding and about the remuneration of directors in their annual accounts. Copies of individual TEC accounts and of an amalgamated income and expenditure account for TECs in England are held in the Library.

HEALTH

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the onset times of the cases of the new variant of CJD by month; and if he will make a statement. [7948]

Mr. Horam: The month and year of onset for the 14 cases of new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease confirmed by the national CJD surveillance unit up to the end of November 1996, listed in order of onset, are:

1. January 1994
2. February 1994
3. March 1994
4. June 1994
5. July 1994
6. August 1994
7. December 1994
8. January 1995
9. January 1995
10. January 1995
11. March 1995
12. July 1995
13. August 1995
14. January 1996

Cases can be confirmed only by examination of brain pathology. Normally this is done post mortem, and in the rare cases where a positive brain biopsy is obtained this is not possible until fairly late in the course of the disease. Therefore there is a long delay between the date of onset—the date of the first clinical symptoms related to CJD—and the date of confirmation. The median duration of illness in these cases is 14 months.

In-patient Treatment

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued on the necessary period of in-patient treatment for a proper risk assessment to be carried out before a patient's discharge. [8262]

Mr. Burns: Guidance issued by the national health service executive in 1994 on the discharge of mentally disordered people requires a full risk assessment to be carried out before discharge of any patient who may present special risks. There is no set time limit for this task.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the assessments by NHS executive regional offices of individual area health authorities' performance in the provision of child and adolescent mental health services; and if he will make a statement. [8521]

Mr. Burns: At this stage there are no plans to publish information relating to the performance by health authorities on child and adolescent mental health services.

Child Prostitution

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to encourage health authorities to address the health risks arising from child prostitution. [8429]

Mr. Burns: Local authority social services have a duty to make inquiries where they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child in their area is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, and this would include information suggesting that a child may need protection from child prostitution. Following the introduction of mandatory children's services plans, the Department of Health is taking forward work to strengthen co-operation between social services and health and education and to encourage user participation in the planning process.

"The Patient's Charter: Services for Children and Young People" details children's rights and expectations of the standards of service the national health service is aiming to achieve. Multidisciplinary teams in young offenders institutions provide a range of preventive health services relating to sexual health, HIV, hepatitis and safe sex. These teams, together where necessary with NHS specialists and outside agencies, also provide a range of counselling relevant to those most vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation on release.

Sheffield Health Authority (Funding)

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the total funding available for Sheffield health authority and *(b)* the increase in funding that has been allocated to Sheffield health authority for 1997–98; if he will express this in percentage terms above inflation; if this funding can be used for the city's hospital trusts; and if he will make a statement. [8298]

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent, by NHS regional office, on consultancy fees relating to the private finance initiative. [8506]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 26 November, at column *119*.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultants there were in *(a)* general medicine, *(b)* general surgery, *(c)* orthopaedics and *(d)* obstetrics and gynaecology in the last year. [8479]

Mr. Malone: The number of hospital consultants in general medicine, general surgery, traumatic and orthopaedic surgery and obstetrics and gynaecology last year is as follows:

Hospital medical consultants in selected specialties in England at 30 September 1995 (whole-time equivalent)

	Number
Obstetrics and gynaecology	880
General surgical group	3,540
of which	
General surgery	1,030
Traumatic and orthopaedic surgery	910
General medicine group	3,720
of which	
General medicine	240

Acute and Community Hospitals

Ms Jowell: To ask the secretary of State for Health (1) how many acute hospitals there are in each district health authority area; [8495]

(2) how many community hospitals there are in each district health authority area. [8496]

Mr. Horam: Information is not available centrally in the form requested. The "Health and Social Services Yearbook", copies of which are available in the Library, details the addresses of all hospitals in each NHS trust and sets out the main trusts in contract with each health authority.

Accident and Emergency Units

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accident and emergency units there are in England. [8498]

Mr. Horam: There are 211 national health service trusts with large accident and emergency departments on 1995–96 figures.

This is different from the figures given in "Bed availability for England 1995–96" due to inconsistencies in data collection following the abolition of the regional health authorities earlier this year. This is being corrected.

Creche Facilities

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital trusts have crèche facilities for *(a)* staff, *(b)* relatives, *(c)* visitors and *(d)* patients. [8502]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Porters

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many porters were employed by acute hospital trusts in each of the last five years. [8476]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Patient Trolleys

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patient trolleys were owned by the NHS in each district health authority area in each of the last five years. [8477]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally.

NHS Hospitality

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total amount spent on hospitality in the NHS in the last three years. [8507]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally.

Care Programme

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many social services departments had implemented the Government's care programme approach on 1 April. [8508]

Mr. Burns: There is no requirement for social services departments to implement the care programme approach as it is the responsibility of national health service trusts.

NHS Staff Conference Fees

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State of Health how much was spent on NHS staff conference registration fees in each of the last three years. [8482]

Mr. Horam: No central data are available which identify spending on national health service staff conference registration fees.

Air Travel Costs

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent by the NHS on air travel to international conferences, seminars and business meetings in each of the last five years. [8486]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not held centrally.

Life-support Machines

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many life-support machines there were in each hospital trust in each of the last five years. [8488]

Mr. Horam: An extremely wide range of equipment is used throughout national health service hospitals for the purpose of life support. The information requested is not, therefore, available centrally.

Annual Reports (NHS Trusts)

Mr. Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent by each NHS trust on the preparation and production of their annual report in each of the last four years. [8490]

Mr. Horam: Information on spending on the preparation and production of annual reports by national health service trusts is not available centrally.

Hospital Beds

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals beds are currently available per 24-hour period by district health authority area. [8492]

Mr. Horam: Information is not collected in the form requested. Information on the average daily number of available beds for each NHS trust is published annually in "Bed Availability for England" copies of which are available in the Library.

Hospital Closures

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* acute hospitals, *(b)* community hospitals and *(c)* accident and emergency units have closed in each of the last five years; and how many are planned to close in the coming financial year. [8494]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally. A list of those substantial changes in service provision which have been contested by community health councils is available in the Library.

Working Children

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are his proposals to ensure that local authority byelaws are updated to protect working children against health and safety hazards in industrial and commercial premises. [8873]

Mr. Burns: Children are not permitted to be employed in industrial undertakings. Health and safety legislation, which is not contained in local authority byelaws, applies to all workers regardless of their age.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the maximum number of hours a child *(a)* under the age of 15 years and *(b)* aged 15 years will be legally permitted to work during school term time, following the implementation of the recommendation arising from his Department's recent consultation exercise. [8874]

Mr. Burns: The maximum permitted number of working hours for children will remain exactly as they are at present, that is 17 hours a week for those under the age of 15, and 20 hours a week for those aged 15 or over.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department last carried out a study to examine the effectiveness of local authority byelaws governing the employment of children, with particular reference to their implementation and enforcement; and if he will conduct a further study. [8794]

Mr. Burns: The last study in this area was reported in 1972. I have no plans at present to commission a further study.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's policy in respect of implementing proposals to protect the health, safety and education of working children. [8796]

Mr. Burns: Officials have recently issued a paper outlining our plans to implement our proposals. Copies have been placed in the Library.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will liaise with the Department of the Environment to ensure that local authorities have adequate resources to enforce byelaws governing the employment of children. [8795]

Mr. Burns: It is for local authorities to determine their expenditure priorities.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many respondents to his Department's recent consultation exercise on the employment of children favoured *(a)* parliamentary legislation and *(b)* revision of local authority byelaws. [8797]

Mr. Burns: We did not seek views on the type of legislation to be used. Of the views expressed, the majority were in favour of the revision of byelaws.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many outbreaks of E. coli 0157 food poisoning have occurred in the Carlisle city council area in the last five years; and how many people were affected in each of the outbreaks; [7923]

(2) how many cases of E. coli 0157 food poisoning have occurred; and how many people have died from the infection in the Carlisle city council area in the last five years. [7924]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* For information on the number of cases of E. coli 0157 in the United Kingdom, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) on 2 December at column *551*.

There were no outbreaks of E. coli 0157 in the city of Carlisle between 1991 to date. Information about single E. coli 0157 cases in the city of Carlisle is given in the table:

E. coli 0157 cases from the city of Carlisle

Year	*Cases*	*Deaths*[1]
1991[2]	0	0
1992	5	0
1993	4	0
1994	3	0
1995	10	0
1996	3	0

Source:
Public Health Laboratory Service Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre.
Notes:
[1] Confirmed with Office for National Statistics.
[2] PHLS (Carlisle) did not routinely test specimens for E. coli 0157 until October 1991.

The higher number of E. coli 0157 cases in 1995 were investigated by North Cumbria health authority and found to be associated with the consumption of wild field mushrooms, picked from fields where cattle had been

grazing. The cases were dispersed over a wide area and no link was established with any particular field.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Accidents

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what insurance arrangements cover the clean-up, restoration and personal compensation payments that may arise from an accident at, or involving *(a)* a commercially operated nuclear power plant, *(b)* a nuclear fuel cycle manufacturing or processing installation and *(c)* nuclear materials in transit resulting in the release of radiation; and how the levels of liability have been calculated. [5729]

Mr. Page: Under United Kingdom law, where third party damage or injury is caused as a result of a nuclear incident at a nuclear site or involving nuclear materials in transit, the UK operator is liable to pay compensation up to a liability limit of £140 million. The limit, which is kept under review, is in line with the recommendation of the nuclear energy agency of the OECD and takes account of the level of commercial insurance cover available.

As a result of the UK's membership of the Paris and Brussels conventions, further public funds and international funds are available, up to a maximum of 300 special drawing rights of the International Monetary Fund—approximately £280 million. If claims exceed this latter figure, additional compensation may be provided by Parliament to the extent that it shall determine.

In line with the Paris convention, compensation is available for damage to persons and property. This would include the costs of environmental restoration and clean up, where there is damage to property, in accordance with normal UK civil law principles as to the assessment of damage.

Arms Sales

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received *(a)* by letter and *(b)* otherwise from opponents of arms sales, since 2 December. [8251]

Mr. Nelson: I regularly receive representations from opponents of arms sales. Those concerning aspects of policy for which my Department is not responsible are directed to the appropriate Department.

World Trade Organisation Meeting (Singapore)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how he will report back from the World Trade Organisation review in Singapore in December. [7895]

Mr. Nelson: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will report to the House in due course on the outcome of the World Trade Organisation ministerial meeting, which is taking place in Singapore from 9 to 13 December.

Defence Companies (Corporate Governance)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received on the export provisions of the corporate governance material issued by British defence companies. [8612]

Mr. Nelson: No such representations have been received.

Digital Broadcasting

Mr. Renton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress he has made in finalising regulations to require BSkyB to license its decoder box and other associated digital technology to other broadcasters. [8319]

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 11 December 1996]:* The final consultation on the regulations which will apply when conditional access services for digital television start, late next year, was completed on 11 December. The draft regulations ensure that whoever establishes a population of set-top boxes, all broadcasters will be able to gain access on fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory terms. We will now make the final regulations available to Parliament for consideration before the recess. Subject to parliamentary approval, they will come into force within 21 calendar days.

Regulations covering the licensing of industrial property for conditional access technology came into force on 23 August this year. These oblige companies who license one manufacturer to build set-up boxes to consider applications from other manufacturers for similar licensing of the same industrial property. Any decision not to permit such licensing would have to be based on fair and transparent grounds, and could be challenged directly in the courts. To go beyond this, to require compulsory licensing of intellectual property rights, would be an extreme step, which the United Kingdom would contemplate only if no other action to tackle anti-competitive behaviour was available. Given that the digital television market is still at a very early stage, with no services being offered before next year, it would be premature to reach such a conclusion.

SCOTLAND

Gourock Ropeworks

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last discussed the matters relating to the demolition of the Gourock ropeworks, Port Glasgow with representatives of *(a)* Historic Scotland and *(b)* Inverclyde council; and if he will make a statement. [7929]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Historic Scotland is an executive agency within the Scottish Office and reports to my right hon. Friend on built heritage matters. My right hon. Friend has not been in direct discussion with Inverclyde council about the Gourock ropeworks.

An application for listed building consent to demolish the ropeworks was passed by Inverclyde district council to Historic Scotland in March of this year. Following careful consideration, my right hon. Friend decided not to call in the application for his own determination. Inverclyde council was informed on 30 August that it was thus free

to determine the application itself. I understand that listed building consent for demolition, subject to conditions, has now been issued by the council.

Mental Illness Specific Grant

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 26 November, *Official Report*, column *162*, who is carrying out the evaluation of the effectiveness of the mental illness specific grant and the advisability of alternative funding arrangements; when he expects to receive the report of this assessment; and if he will make a statement. [7941]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Nuffield centre for community care studies at Glasgow university was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the grant. The draft final report has been sent to the Scottish Office. It is expected that the final report will be submitted early in 1997. Future arrangements will be considered in light of the findings of that study, the social work services inspectorate report on day services for people with mental illness, the views of the Scottish Affairs Committee on the closure of psychiatric hospitals in Scotland and analysis of monitoring returns from all projects.

Seat Belts

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many drivers have been prosecuted for allowing a child under 14 years to travel in a vehicle without wearing a seat belt or legal restraint in Scotland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [8230]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him yesterday regarding the prosecution of seat belt offences.

WALES

NHS Administration

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of the NHS budget was spent on administration in *(a)* 1988 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [8108]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The proportion of the NHS budget in Wales spent on administration in 1988–89 and 1995–96 was about 6 per cent. and 7 per cent. respectively.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total grant made by the Welsh Office to the Welsh Development Agency; and how much of this grant was spent in advertising in England to encourage companies to relocate in Wales, in the last year for which information is available. [8106]

Mr. Hague: Total central Government provision to the Welsh Development Agency in 1995–96 was £29.515 million.

The guidelines covering the agency's inward investment function and marketing activity specifically state that it should not actively encourage relocations to Wales from any part of the United Kingdom. Where, however, companies approach the agency for help with relocation projects, the agency should seek to establish that such projects have the potential to provide net additional benefits for the United Kingdom economy and not just for Wales.

Expenditure on advertising is an operational matter for the agency under its acting chief executive. I have therefore asked the acting chief executive to write to the hon. Member with details of the agency's advertising expenditure in 1995–96. I shall arrange for a copy of the reply to be placed in the Library of the House.

Health Service Staff

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* general practitioners, *(b)* nurses and *(c)* auxiliary staff there are currently in Wales. [8173]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The latest available information is as follows:

At 29 March 1996 there were 1,850 general practitioners in Wales, of which 1,726 were unrestricted principals.

At 30 June 1996 there were 24,848 whole-time equivalent nursing and midwifery staff directly employed by health authorities and NHS trusts in Wales. In addition there were 622 whole-time equivalent nurses employed by general medical practitioners at 1 October 1995.

At 30 June 1996 there were 5,832 whole-time equivalent ancillary staff directly employed by health authorities and NHS trusts in Wales.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the overall number of *(a)* administrative staff, *(b)* managerial staff, *(c)* nurses, *(d)* junior doctors and *(e)* other medical staff employed in each region in Wales for each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [7486]

Mr. Hague: As the information is not available on a consistent geographical basis for the years requested, figures are provided for each organisation in Wales. For convenience these organisations have been grouped into three broad areas as shown in the following table. Information for nurses is not available separately from midwifery staff.

Staff in post (whole-time equivalent numbers)[1]

Region/Organisation[2]	*Administrative and clerical staff*[3]				*Managers*			
	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
North Wales								
Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust	336	330	335	343	53	54	52	56
Glan Clwyd Hospital NHS Trust	298	297	315	347	27	29	28	31
Gwynedd Community Health NHS Trust	—	256	265	281	—	23	25	30
Gwynedd Hospitals NHS Trust	—	296	293	284	—	14	9	8
North Wales Ambulance NHS Trust	—	34	51	55	—	6	11	13
Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS Trust	260	267	275	301	27	30	32	32
Clwyd DHA/FHSA	188	159	147	—	40	35	37	—
Gwynedd DHA/FHSA	705	87	89	—	74	28	27	—
North Wales Health Authority	—	—	—	168	—	—	—	56
Total	1,787	1,727	1,770	1,779	221	218	221	225
Mid and West Wales								
Carmarthen and District NHS Trust	216	221	225	244	21	22	24	24
Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust	123	129	134	139	16	20	21	26
Derwen NHS Trust	—	131	132	125	—	19	20	14
Llanelli Dinefwr NHS Trust	149	142	146	146	17	19	22	21
Pembrokeshire NHS Trust	275	255	256	268	21	17	17	17
Powys Healthcare NHS Trust	233	221	195	205	37	37	31	22

Staff in post (whole-time equivalent numbers)[1]

Region/Organisation[2]	*Administrative and clerical staff*[3]				*Managers*			
	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Dyfed DHA/FHSA	303	149	136	—	48	39	36	—
Powys DHA/FHSA	62	58	57	—	15	16	16	—
Dyfed Powys Health Authority	—	—	—	139	—	—	—	48
Total	1,360	1,307	1,280	1,268	175	189	187	172
South Wales								
Bridgend and District NHS Trust	336	349	362	396	32	39	40	45
Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS Trust	429	323	343	361	36	31	45	44
East Glamorgan NHS Trust	213	240	262	286	17	20	23	26
Glan Hafren NHS Trust	586	600	614	662	56	67	61	80
Glan-y-Mor NHS Trust	—	—	410	411	—	—	30	33
Gwent Community Health NHS Trust	309	309	323	301	49	58	69	58
Llandough Hospital and Community NHS Trust	338	340	357	384	72	72	78	80
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance NHS Trust	—	49	51	55	—	32	36	36
Morriston Hospital NHS Trust	—	282	361	365	—	22	38	32
Nevill Hall and District NHS Trust	202	194	196	204	18	18	20	20
North Glamorgan NHS Trust	265	273	272	327	13	20	24	36
Rhondda Healthcare NHS Trust	154	166	181	200	17	20	29	31
S and E Wales Ambulance NHS Trust[7]	56	52	64	58	27	25	25	38
Swansea NHS Trust	247	249	263	275	15	17	17	22
University Dental Hospital NHS Trust	—	44	54	53	—	4	4	2
UHW Healthcare NHS Trust	818	910	931	947	72	93	108	98
Velindre NHS Trust[8]	—	62	67	108	—	11	12	18
West Wales Ambulance NHS Trust[9]	—	—	57	99	—	—	6	16
Gwent DHA/FHSA	165	143	123	—	30	30	30	—
Mid Glamorgan DHA/FHSA	327	255	201	—	53	43	40	—
South Glamorgan DHA/FHSA	317	261	202	—	52	51	43	—
West Glamorgan DHA/FHSA	920	609	137	—	78	59	24	—
Bro Taf Health Authority	—	—	—	248	—	—	—	88
Gwent Health Authority	—	—	—	126	—	—	—	32
Iechyd Morgannwg Health Authority	—	—	—	123	—	—	—	33
Total	5,683	5,710	5,831	5,989	636	732	802	866
Other Health Authorities[10]	1,252	1,161	991	734	128	153	141	116

See notes in col. *337*.

Region/Organisation[2]	*Nursing and midwifery staff*[4]				*Junior doctors*[5]			
	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
North Wales								
Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust	1,537	1,523	1,415	1,443	16	17	18	—
Glan Clwyd Hospital NHS Trust	870	881	893	928	81	87	83	—
Gwynedd Community Health NHS Trust	—	1,111	1,109	1,140	—	9	8	—
Gwynedd Hospitals NHS Trust	—	857	859	856	—	90	102	—
North Wales Ambulance NHS Trust	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS Trust	837	861	887	927	83	82	81	—
Clwyd DHA/FHSA	83	84	65	—	2	2	1	—
Gwynedd DHA/FHSA	2,049	36	26	—	104	—	1	—
North Wales Health Authority	—	—	—	10	—	—	—	—
Total	5,377	5,353	5,255	5,304	286	286	294	—
Mid and West Wales								
Carmarthen and District NHS Trust	581	585	582	608	47	49	46	—
Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust	419	415	398	389	22	22	21	—
Derwen NHS Trust	—	483	457	465	—	15	14	—
Llanelli Dinefwr NHS Trust	523	533	530	530	28	26	25	—
Pembrokeshire NHS Trust	760	725	701	704	44	44	47	—
Powys Healthcare NHS Trust	1,009	995	914	917	5	4	2	—
Dyfed DHA/FHSA	538	7	5	—	18	2	1	—
Powys DHA/FHSA	1	—	—	—	—	1	1	—
Dyfed Powys Health Authority	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	3,831	3,743	3,587	3,614	164	163	157	—

Region/Organisation[2]	Nursing and midwifery staff[4] 1993	1994	1995	1996	Junior doctors[5] 1993	1994	1995	1996
South Wales								
Bridgend and District NHS Trust	1,678	1,726	1,767	1,751	64	72	74	—
Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS Trust	1,305	1,160	1,179	1,182	39	36	41	—
East Glamorgan NHS Trust	716	733	747	717	72	82	74	—
Glan Hafren NHS Trust	2,079	1,875	1,835	1,907	166	156	168	—
Glan-y-Mor NHS Trust	—	—	1,496	1,433	—	—	63	—
Gwent Community Health NHS Trust	1,273	1,250	1,216	1,178	19	21	21	—
Llandough Hospital and Community NHS Trust	764	781	890	928	77	82	84	—
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance NHS Trust	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Morriston Hospital NHS Trust	—	1,006	1,118	1,180	—	99	110	—
Nevill Hall and District NHS Trust	743	728	735	726	52	54	59	—
North Glamorgan NHS Trust	1,052	1,045	1,030	1,082	75	71	65	—
Rhondda Healthcare NHS Trust	723	713	685	727	4	6	4	—
S and E Wales Ambulance NHS Trust[7]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Swansea NHS Trust	809	778	815	864	68	78	89	—
University Dental Hospital NHS Trust	—	9	8	8	—	—	—	—
UHW Healthcare NHS Trust	2,154	2,282	2,076	2,059	331	330	342	—
Velindre NHS Trust[8]	—	86	97	103	—	10	13	—
West Wales Ambulance NHS Trust[9]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gwent DHA/FHSA	70	66	14	—	2	3	1	—
Mid Glamorgan DHA/FHSA	220	162	19	—	17	4	2	—
South Glamorgan DHA/FHSA	136	99	19	—	6	3	3	—
West Glamorgan DHA/FHSA	2,413	1,551	64	—	138	68	2	—
Bro Taf Health Authority	—	—	—	9	—	—	—	—
Gwent Health Authority	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	—
Lyechyd Morgannwg Health Authority	—	—	—	6	—	—	—	—
Total	16,136	16,050	15,808	15,864	1,129	1,175	1,214	—
Other Health Authorities[10]	77	73	79	67	—	—	—	—

See notes in col. 337.

Region/Organisation[2]	Other medical staff[6] 1993	1994	1995	1996
North Wales				
Clwydian Community Care NHS Trust	41	43	41	—
Glan Clwyd Hospital NHS Trust	69	73	87	—
Gwynedd Community Health NHS Trust	—	32	31	—
Gwynedd Hospitals NHS Trust	—	75	81	—
North Wales Ambulance NHS Trust	—	—	—	—
Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS Trust	57	59	65	—
Clwyd DHA/FHSA	4	6	6	—
Gwynedd DHA/FHSA	107	4	6	—
North Wales Health Authority	—	—	—	—
Total	278	292	317	—
Mid and West Wales				
Carmarthen and District NHS Trust	46	49	55	—
Ceredigion and Mid Wales NHS Trust	29	28	32	—
Derwen NHS Trust	—	14	11	—
Llanelli Dinefwr NHS Trust	37	38	42	—
Pembrokeshire NHS Trust	49	49	48	—
Powys Healthcare NHS Trust	35	36	36	—
Dyfed DHA/FHSA	19	5	5	—
Powys DHA/FHSA	3	3	3	—
Dyfed Powys Health Authority	—	—	—	—
Total	217	223	234	—

	Other medical staff[6] 1993	1994	1995	1996
South Wales				
Bridgend and District NHS Trust	71	73	79	—
Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS Trust	45	34	33	—
East Glamorgan NHS Trust	51	60	61	—
Glan Hafren NHS Trust	110	124	132	—
Glan-y-Mor NHS Trust	—	—	62	—
Gwent Community Health NHS Trust	42	46	45	—
Llandough Hospital and Community NHS Trust	39	39	46	—
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance NHS Trust	—	—	—	—
Morriston Hospital NHS Trust	—	69	69	—
Nevill Hall and District NHS Trust	42	45	48	—
North Glamorgan NHS Trust	52	51	53	—
Rhondda Healthcare NHS Trust	26	29	33	—
S and E Wales Ambulance NHS Trust[7]	—	—	—	—
Swansea NHS Trust	56	58	67	—
University Dental Hospital NHS Trust	—	1	1	—
UHW Healthcare NHS Trust	157	164	160	—
Velindre NHS Trust[8]	—	9	8	—
West Wales Ambulance NHS Trust[9]	—	—	—	—
Gwent DHA/FHSA	4	4	5	—
Mid Glamorgan DHA/FHSA	4	4	5	—
South Glamorgan DHA/FHSA	9	7	9	—
West Glamorgan DHA/FHSA	136	77	5	—
Bro Taf Health Authority	—	—	—	—

	Other medical staff[4]			
	1993	1994	1995	1996
Gwent Health Authority	—	—	—	—
Iechyd Morgannwg Health Authority	—	—	—	—
Total	843	894	920	—
Other Health Authorities	14	10	10	—

[1] At 30 September for 1993 to 1995 and 30 June 1996.
[2] Organisations are listed under the name they had at 30 June 1996. Organisational changes mean that figures for some individual organisations are not comparable over all the years given.
[3] Including managers (staff paid on manager payscales).
[4] Excludes pre-registration learners.
[5] Senior registrars, registrars, senior house officers and house officers working in the community or public health service.
[6] Consultants, staff grades, associate specialists, hospital practitioners and clinical assistants working in the community or public health service but excluding general medical practitioners.
[7] Includes staff formerly employed in the Powys ambulance service.
[8] Data for 1996 include staff employed by Breast Test Wales which was previously included with Welsh Health Common Services staff.
[9] Includes staff formerly employed in the East Dyfed ambulance service.
[10] Staff employed in Welsh Health Common Services Authority and Health Promotion Wales.

Modern Apprenticeships

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many young people have started accelerated modern apprenticeships in Wales, by local authority. [8525]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The information is not available in the form requested. However, the number of young people who have started on accelerated modern apprenticeships in each of the training and enterprise council areas of Wales are detailed in the following table:

Cumulative starts on accelerated modern apprenticeships by TEC area as at 10 November 1996

Name of training and enterprise council	Starts on accelerated modern apprenticeships
Gwent	192
Mid Glamorgan	135
North-east Wales	308
North-west Wales	94
Powys	37
South Glamorgan	161
West Wales	337
Wales total	1,264

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was his Department's initial forecast of the number of places available on accelerated modern apprenticeships in Wales. [8526]

Mr. Evans: The departmental report published in March 1995 estimated that 1,000 young people would enter accelerated modern apprenticeships in 1995–96, the first year of the programme. In the event, 850 places were contracted with the Welsh TECs for that year and 843 young people commenced training. Planning assumptions for 1996–7 and 1997–8 are for around 1,100 new starts in each year, but as indicated in the departmental report, published in March 1996, in practice the balance between accelerated modern apprenticeships and modern apprenticeships will vary according to local demands.

Cwmcarn Grant-maintained School

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many objections he received to proposals to establish a sixth form at Cwmcarn grant-maintained school; how many of those objectives were from *(a)* individuals and *(b)* organisations; and if he will list those organisations; [8347]

(2) how many pupils are required at a school for it to be granted sixth form status; and what guidance on this his Department has issued; [8529]

(3) what consultations he undertook before granting Cwmcarn grant-maintained school sixth form status. [8354]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Eight objections were received to the published proposal of 15 January 1996, all of which were from organisations. They were:

The former Gwent local education authority

Risca comprehensive school

Blackwood comprehensive school

Pontllanfraith comprehensive school

Oakdale comprehensive school

Newbridge comprehensive school

Gwent tertiary college

Further Education Funding Council for Wales.

Each proposal is considered on its merits and in the light of guidance in Welsh Office circular 13/95, "The Supply of School Places", a copy of which is in the Library. No particular number of pupils is required for sixth form status. My. right hon. Friend is not required to undertake consultations on statutory proposals.

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to publish the audited accounts of Cwmcarn grant-maintained school. [8348]

Mr. Evans: My right hon. Friend does not publish the audited accounts of grant-maintained schools. It is for the schools' governing bodies to ensure that the accounts are available at the school for inspection by any member of the public.

Meningitis

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of meningitis among Cardiff students have been reported since 28 September; and if he will list the location at which each sufferer was first diagnosed, indicating the date. [8727]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There have been seven cases of meningococcal infection, including both meningitis and septicaemia forms of the disease, reported amongst

Cardiff students since 28 September 1996. Details are given in the following table.

Cases of meningococcal infection among Cardiff students

Case number	*Hospital*	*Date admitted*	*Date diagnosed*[1]
1	Royal Gwent, Newport	16 October 1996	16 October 1996
2	University Hospital of Wales	16 November 1996	16 November 1996
3	University Hospital of Wales	26 November 1996	28 December 1996
4	University Hospital of Wales	28 November 1996	28 December 1996
5	University Hospital of Wales	27 November 1996	29 November 1996
6	University Hospital of Wales	29 November 1996	29 November 1996
7	University Hospital of Wales	2 December 1996	[2]5 December 1996

[1] Refers to the date of clinical diagnosis as cases may not be microbiologically confirmed until several days later.
[2] Admitted for observation and commenced on treatment as a precautionary measure from 2 December 1996.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of meningitis that have occurred in Wales since 20 September his Department assessed to have been *(a)* part of a cluster and *(b)* isolated instances. [8798]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There have been 44 notified cases of meningococcal infection, including both meningitis and septicaemia, reported to the communicable disease surveillance centre, Wales since 20 September 1996. There has been one reported cluster. This centred around the university halls, Penylan, Cardiff. A cluster is usually understood as more than one case reported, in a single setting, in a short period of time.

Sea Empress

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent research his Department has evaluated into the effects in the *(a)* short, *(b)* medium and *(c)* long-term on the health and welfare of flora and fauna arising from the accident involving the discharge of oil from the Sea Empress tanker in February. [8800]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My right hon. Friend has established the Sea Empress environmental evaluation committee to assess the environmental consequences of the oil spill. A research programme is being taken forward and a final report is expected in 1997.

Village Hall Repairs

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes he has made to existing grant schemes to enable local groups to obtain funding for substantial repairs to village halls. [9282]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In order to fulfil the commitment given in the White Paper, "A Working Countryside for Wales", I have reconsidered the future of the £472,000 budget for the voluntary youth services, village halls and community centres scheme and have decided to pass the management of it to the Wales Council for Voluntary Action—WCVA. Most of the money will be used towards the match funding of a £5.6 million grant the WCVA has secured from the Millennium Commission for its project, 21st century halls for Wales. The project will fund improvements to or the rebuilding of around 50 community halls which will then stand as beacons of good practice. A small proportion will be reserved to provide an advice service for all village and community hall committees.

DEFENCE

Hawk Aircraft

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's role in the licensing for export by United Kingdom manufacturers of Hawk *(a)* attack and *(b)* trainer aircraft; and what different provisions apply to the two types of Hawk. [8613]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department advises the Department of Trade and Industry on various aspects of export licensing. These include the legitimate defence requirements of the recipient, the effect on regional stability and the risk of use against United Kingdom forces. These provisions apply to all export licence applications referred to the MOD.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what aircraft types are permitted to carry out air-to-air refuelling at the lowest notified altitudes in areas 10 and 12. [8602]

Mr. Soames: RAF tankers Tristar, VC10K and VC10 C Mk1K and receiver aircraft VC10, Hercules, Tornado, Harrier, Sea Harrier, Jaguar, Nimrod and Sentry are permitted to carry out air-to-air refuelling exercises at the lowest notified altitudes in areas 10 and 12.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of breaches of low flying regulations in each year since 1992; and in each case what disciplinary action was taken against the aircrew responsible. [8522]

Mr. Soames: Details of breaches in 1992 are not recorded centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Details of breaches and disciplinary action taken for 1993 are given in the seventh report of the Defence Committee, HC 314, "Low Flying; Follow-up to the Fifth Report of Session 1989–90", Session 1993–94, on low flying, pages 35 to 36, and in the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 5 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *112*. I refer the hon. Member to the answers that I gave to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 22 November 1995, *Official Report*, column *1042* and to the hon. Member for Meirionydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 18 April 1996, *Official Report*, column *578*, for 1994 and 1995. The following additional breaches of low flying regulations in 1995 have

been confirmed by RAF police investigations since the latter date and, unless stated otherwise, a lateral breach of the avoidance area listed occurred in each case.

Date	*Location*	*Numbers and types of A/C*	*Nationality*	*Nature of breach*
22 May	Billinge, Lancs.	1 × Tornado	TTTE	Unauthorised flight within LFA8 of the UKLFS
21 September	Full Sutton E. York.	3 × Hercules	Belgian Air Force	Full Sutton Airfield avoidance area
21 September	Full Sutton	3 × Hercules	Belgian Air Force	Unauthorised flight within LFA11 of the UKLFS
21 November	Bicester, Oxon	1 × F15	USAF	Overflew Bicester, a town listed for avoidance
20 December	Caerlaverock, Dumfries and Galloway	1 × Tornado	RAF	Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust avoidance area

In the case where the nationality is shown as TTTE, the aircraft came from the tri-national Tornado training establishment at RAF Cottesmore which trains aircrew of the Royal Air Force, German air force and Italian air force using aircraft provided by all three nations.

Formal disciplinary action under the service discipline Acts has been taken in one of the cases listed above. The pilot of the Tornado responsible for the breach at Billinge, Lancashire on 22 May was dealt with under summary procedures and pleaded guilty to one charge, contrary to section 69 of the Air Force Act 1955, of conduct to the prejudice of good order and Air Force discipline for which he was reprimanded and fined.

In cases involving UK aircrew where formal disciplinary action is not appropriate, individuals may be interviewed by their station commander or other appropriate senior officer. Such action could be recorded on individual's career records and affect flying status and promotion prospects, but it is not our policy to release details of such action. It is also the responsibility of senior officers to ascertain what lessons can be learnt from such incidents. Central records are not maintained.

Reports on breaches by foreign aircrew are passed to the relevant national authorities, with whom responsibility for any further action rests.

Details of confirmed breaches for 1996 have yet to be collated.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the maximum manoeuvres permitted by a military aircraft which is subjected to *(a)* a pre-briefed and *(b)* an unbriefed interception by a fighter aircraft in the United Kingdom airspace while flying (i) in the military low flying system (ii) between 2,000 and 5,000 ft and (iii) above 5,000 ft. [8603]

Mr. Soames: The maximum manoeuvres permitted vary according to the type of military aircraft being flown.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have been made since August 1995 to flow control in the low flying system in the area between Northampton and Sywell airfield; and what were the reasons for those changes. [8588]

Mr. Soames: Due to the urban expansion of Northampton north-eastwards towards Northampton/Sywell airfield, the area between these locations is no longer available for military low flying and the unidirectional flow has therefore been removed.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have been made since August 1995 to flow control in the low flying system in the area between Doncaster and Sandtoft airfield; and what were the reasons for those changes. [8601]

Mr. Soames: Following the closure of the military air traffic zone around RAF Finningley on 1 October 1995, a north-north-westerly unidirectional flow was introduced in the gap between the Sheffield transit area and Sandtoft airfield to improve flight safety at low level.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions are contained in the "UK Military Low Flying Handbook" concerning the use by aircrew transiting the gap between Newcastle and Spadeadam of an air traffic radar service from RAF Spadeadam. [8589]

Mr. Soames: None.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have been made since August 1995 to flow control in the low flying system in the Bedford area; and what was the reasons for those changes. [8591]

Mr. Soames: Due to a reduction in the amount of controlled airspace around Bedford airfield, airspace to the north of Bedford town became available for military low flying. To improve flight safety at low level, a westerly unidirectional flow was introduced between these two locations.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to publish the results of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency study of the probability of mid-air collisions in the low-level airspace; and when. [8599]

Mr. Soames: We will respond to the air accidents investigation branch—AAIB—once we have received DERA's report and have had the opportunity to consider it fully. Our response to the AAIB will be a matter of public record.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates of those accidents to Jaguar, Harrier and Tornado aircraft since 1990 which the subsequent inquiry concluded would have been prevented if ground proximity warning systems had been fitted to the aircraft. [8586]

Mr. Soames: It is not possible to report which accidents might have been avoided by installation of a ground proximity warning system as such hypothetical assessments fall outside the terms of reference of RAF boards of inquiry.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have been made since August 1995 to the structure of the low flying system in the Salisbury plain area; and what were the reasons for those changes. [8592]

Mr. Soames: The previous boundaries of low flying areas 1A, 1B and 1C used a mixture of geographic features and lines of latitude and longitude to delineate the areas. Changes were made in April and August 1996 so that significant line features such as the M4, A34, A41 (T) and other roads were adopted as boundaries to facilitate the management and conduct of low-level helicopter operations.

Sea Harrier Collision

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the mid-air collision 19 September between a Royal Navy Sea Harrier and a Dutch F-16; and what plans he has to issue a summary of the inquiry report on this accident. [8598]

Mr. Soames: On 19 September 1996, a Royal Navy Sea Harrier and a Dutch F-16 touched in mid-air while conducting air combat training manoeuvres off Portland Bill. This resulted in damage to the nose of the Sea Harrier and to the tail of the F-16. Neither pilot sustained injuries, and both aircraft recovered safely to RNAS Yeovilton.

A board of inquiry was convened to investigate the incident in conjunction with the Dutch authorities. Once this process is complete, a summary of the findings of the board of inquiry will be placed in the Library of the House.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how much his Department will spend on Christmas trees and decorations this year; how many Christmas trees will be bought for his Department's headquarters; and what are the type and country of origin of the trees; [7569]

(2) how much his Department plans to spend on celebrating Christmas and the new year. [7584]

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* About £1,300 is to be spent on official Christmas cards. There will also be some associated postage costs. There are otherwise no plans for official expenditure on Christmas and the new year.

Overseas Police Training

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, for each year since 1980, those overseas countries in which police forces have received support for training from his budget. [8026]

Mr. Soames: Records of training provided in the UK were not held centrally before September 1993 and information before that date is incomplete. There is no record of UK training of civilian police forces being funded by my Department since that date, although training has been carried out, funded either by other Government Departments or the countries themselves.

Detailed records of training provided overseas are not maintained centrally. However, from the early 1980s until 30 June 1996, my Department did part-fund loan service personnel in the Caribbean who, among other duties, provided training for police special service units in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Caribbean Dependent Territories. Since June the training, though still conducted by members of the armed forces, has been wholly funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Convicted Service Men (Cyprus)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the outcome of the case of the three British service men convicted of manslaughter of the Danish tour guide in Cyprus. [8516]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 26 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns *199–200*.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was his Department's total contribution to the defence costs of three British troops based in Cyprus who were convicted of the manslaughter of a Danish tour guide; and if he will make a statement; [8698]

(2) if he will list what payments his Department is making to each of the three British service men who are at present serving a life sentence for the manslaughter of the Danish tour guide in Cyprus. [8724]

Mr. Soames: There has been no change in the position outlined in my answers of 20 May 1996, *Official Report*, column *52*, and 4 June 1996, *Official Report*, column *334*.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the terms of the discharge from the British Army that were given to the three British service men convicted of the manslaughter of the Danish tour guide in Cyprus. [8640]

Mr. Soames: The three individuals were discharged in April this year under paragraph 9.404 of Queen's Regulations for the Army for misconduct having been sentenced by a civil court to imprisonment.

RAF Spadeadam

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if military aircraft inbound to the RAF Spadeadam range at low level from the east are permitted to cross the area of directional flow control west of Newcastle in a westerly direction *(a)* while receiving a radar advisory service from RAF Spadeadam and *(b)* when not in receipt of any air traffic service. [8587]

Mr. Soames: No. Compliance with flow arrows is mandatory for all low military aircraft, except helicopters flying below 250 feet above ground level, irrespective of whether they are receiving a radar advisory service.

Canadian Forces Base, Goose Bay

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates of deployment and units involved for each deployment of non-flying units to Canadian forces base, Goose bay in 1995 and 1996; and what plans he has for further non-flying unit training deployments to Goose bay. [8595]

Mr. Soames: Dates of deployment and units involved for each deployment of non-flying units to Goose bay in 1995 and 1996 are as follows:

26 January to 26 February 1995: Composite deployment from various RAF regiment units.

14 January to 13 February 1996: Composite deployment from various RAF regiment units.

Plans for further non-flying unit deployments to Goose bay are:

4 January to 9 January 1997: Composite deployment from elements of 5 Airborne Brigade.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many sorties were flown by each Royal Air Force aircraft type at Canadian forces base, Goose bay in 1996. [8593]

Mr. Soames: Royal Air Force aircraft have flown 800 training sorties at Goose bay in 1996; 782 of these were by Tornado GR1 aircraft and 18 by Hercules aircraft.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the squadrons which carried out training at Canadian forces base, Goose bay in 1996; and what were the deployment dates for each squadron. [8594]

Mr. Soames: The information on flying squadron deployments is as follows:

Number 47 Squadron: 14 January to 20 January 1996

Number IX Squadron: 12 April to 3 May 1996

Number 617 Squadron: 3 May to 24 May 1996

Number 17 Squadron: 24 May to 14 June 1996

Number 11 (AC) Squadron: 24 August to 13 September 1996

Number 14 Squadron: 13 September to 4 October 1996

Number 13 Squadron: 4 October to 18 October 1996.

Nimrod Aircrew

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the changes to training, procedures and regulations for Nimrod aircrew following the findings of the board of inquiry into the accident in September 1995. [8597]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Jaguar Aircraft (Accident)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the accident to Jaguar No. XZ396 in 1995; what was the damage category of the aircraft; at what location repairs were undertaken; and on what date the aircraft re-entered service. [8605]

Mr. Soames: As a result of an incident in 1995, Jaguar XZ396 received category 3 damage which was repaired at RAF Coltishall. The aircraft was returned to service on 23 April 1996.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the circumstances of the accident involving a Royal Air Force Jaguar in Alaska on 24 July. [8604]

Mr. Soames: The aircraft was participating in Cope Thunder, a major United States air force exercise designed to provide aircrew with the opportunity to develop advanced tactics and procedures in joint air operations, when it crashed some 40 miles north of Anchorage, Alaska. The pilot ejected safely. An RAF board of inquiry has been convened to determine the cause of this accident and consider what action may be necessary to minimise the risk of recurrence.

Joint Rapid Deployment Force

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the ability of the JRDF to utilise current British Army communications systems. [8349]

Mr. Soames: Units drawn from all three services are assigned to the joint rapid deployment force and are equipped and trained to use their own communications systems.

RAF Boulmer

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the capability of RAF Boulmer to provide an air traffic radar service to military aircraft operating at low level over Northumberland. [8590]

Mr. Soames: As an air defence unit, RAF Boulmer is neither manned nor equipped to offer an air traffic radar service to military aircraft operating at low level over Northumberland.

Tornado Aircraft

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of the deployment of Tornados from the 38 fighter-bomber wing, German air force, to RAF Coningsby during January 1996; how many sorties were flown; how many of these were at low level; and how many practice attacks were made on UK ranges. [8606]

Mr. Soames: The purpose of the deployment was to conduct a flight trial to test the compatibility of an electronic countermeasures system with the aircraft. A total of seven sorties were flown, none of which was at low level. No practice attacks were made on UK ranges.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement on which United Kingdom airfield is to be the base for Royal Air Force Tornado squadrons relocating from Germany; and what is the planned date for relocation. [8600]

Mr. Soames: I hope to make an announcement in the new year about the redeployment of the Tornado squadrons from RAF Bruggen following its closure in 2002.

Gulf War (Injections)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many injections classified as secret were given to each individual Gulf war service man; [8450]

(2) how many service men in the Gulf war received injections which were classified as secret and were not listed on the medical documents of each service man; [8452]

Mr. Horam: In 1997–98 Sheffield health authority will receive an integrated allocation of £270.5 million, a cash increase of £9 million—3.45 per cent.—which represents a real terms growth of £3.7 million—1.42 per cent.

In 1997–98 Sheffield health authority will receive a general allocation of £257.2 million, a cash increase of £8.4 million—3.38 per cent.—which represents a real terms growth of £3.4 million—1.35 per cent.

This is indeed funding which can be used for Sheffield's hospital trusts. It is for individual health authorities to decide the level and type of services purchased, in partnership with general practitioners locally.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to ensure that there is no conflict of interest between the duties of the new head of the private finance initiative and his responsibilities as a senior executive of Tarmac plc. [8431]

Mr. Horam: There is no possibility of a conflict of interest arising from the appointment of Mr. Robert Osborne as head of the private finance unit of the national health service executive. Approval of business cases for private finance initiative schemes is not part of Mr. Osborne's responsibilities. Nor will he have any advisory role in schemes in which Tarmac has an interest.

NHS Executives

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what terms he approved the provision of a vehicle to Mr. John Greetham in his role as chair of the Yorkshire and North regional NHS executive; and how many other regional executive chairs receive a similar benefit. [8607]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) on 24 June at column 22.

Overseas Adoption Helpline

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what Government funding has been made available to the overseas adoption helpline in each year since 1992; what Government funding is planned for 1998 to 2000; and if he will make a statement. [8520]

Mr. Burns: Financial support for the overseas adoption helpline since 1992 is as follows:

1992–93: £80,834
1993–94: £96,000
1994–95: £96,000
1995–96: £96,000
1996–97: £50,000

There are currently no plans to provide further funding after 31 March 1997.

Computer Software

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the contract to supply computer software to the Chelsea and Westminster hospital was put out to tender. [8432]

Mr. Horam: The Riverside acute unit, now known as the Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare NHS trust, issued the invitation to tender in December 1993 in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*.

Renal Dialysis Machines

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many renal dialysis machines there are per health authority; and how many renal patients on dialysis there are in each health authority. [8500]

Mr. Horam: The information is not available centrally in the form requested. However, the number of haemodialysis stations in hospitals in each national health service region for 1993 is contained in the "National Review of Renal Services Part ll; Evidence for the Review". The number of renal patients on dialysis in each NHS region in 1993, by renal unit, is shown in the same document. Copies of the report are available in the Library.

Ambulance Services

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the size of the ambulance fleet by ambulance service in each of the last five years. [8504]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally. However, the second report of the Health Committee in Session 1994–95, copies of which are in the Library, contains some information on numbers of emergency ambulances.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on new ambulances by ambulance trust in each of the last five years. [8487]

Mr. Horam: This information is not available centrally.

Intensive Care Provision

Mr. Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* intensive care units, *(b)* intensive care beds, *(c)* paediatric intensive units and *(d)* paediatric intensive care beds there are by district health authority area. [8499]

Mr. Horam: Information on the provision of adult intensive care provision is not collected in the form requested. Information on the average daily number of available beds by broad ward classification for each national health service trust is published annually in "Bed Availability for England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Information on the number of paediatric intensive care units and beds is not routinely collected at present. However a survey of paediatric intensive care provision was undertaken earlier this year and the results published in a report on 29 May. This report by the chief executive of the national health service executive is entitled, "Paediatric Intensive Care" and is available in the Library.

Pay Beds

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pay beds there were by NHS executive region in each of the last five years. [8503]

Mr. Horam: Pay beds have not been centrally authorised since 31 March 1991 and the Department has not collected information on pay bed numbers since then.

General Practitioners

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioner practices there are in each district health authority area. [8497]

Mr. Malone: The available information will be placed in the Library.

NHS Trusts (Wartime Huts)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts are using wartime huts for patient accommodation. [8501]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Speech Therapists

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many speech therapists per 100,000 population are currently provided for children in *(a)* Southwark, *(b)* Birmingham, *(c)* Manchester, *(d)* Kingston, *(e)* Lewisham and *(f)* England. [8473]

Mr. Burns: The information is not available centrally in the form requested.

The number of speech therapists employed by the national health service hospital and community health services by health authority areas is available from the Department of Health's statistical tables, "NHS Hospital and Community Health Services staff by health authority areas, England 1995"—the latest year available—which are available in the Library. Information on the estimated 1995 population in health authorities is available from the Library in "Office for National Statistic Monitor for Population and Health: Mid-1995 population estimates for re-organised local and health authority areas in England and Wales".

The number of speech therapists per head of population within health authorities should be interpreted with caution because in some cases the population served by the organisations in each authority may be greater than the population of the health authority itself.

Nurses

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the shortfall of hospital nursing staff by NHS executive regional office in each year since 1990. [8474]

Mr. Malone: The national pay review body has considered all the evidence each year since 1990 and has concluded that there have been no general shortfalls of hospital nursing staff.

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses *(a)* entered the profession and *(b)* ceased to practise in each year since 1990. [8475]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Departmental Staff (Travel Costs)

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on staff travel costs between Richmond house, Whitehall and Quarry house, Leeds in each year since 1992. [8481]

Mr. Horam: The information is not available in the form requested.

Estimated costs of payments for travel between Leeds and London derived from special exercises for the first two periods are:

	£
December 1993–November 1994	860,000
October 1994–September 1995	560,000
April 1995–March 1996	680,000
April 1996–November 1996	280,000

We cannot differentiate costs between Richmond house, Quarry house and other Department of Health buildings in London and Leeds.

National Blood Authority

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much was spent by the National Blood Authority in each of the last three years on *(a)* conference registration fees, *(b)* lease cars for senior management, *(c)* air travel, *(d)* hospitality and *(e)* business travel within the United Kingdom; [8483]

(2) how much was spent by the bio products laboratory in each of the last three years on *(a)* conference registration fees, *(b)* lease cars for senior management, *(c)* air travel, *(d)* hospitality and *(e)* business travel within the United kingdom. [8484]

Mr. Horam: These are matters for the National Blood Authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Colin Walker OBE, chairman of the National Blood Authority.

Neo-natal Cots

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many neo-natal cots there were in each hospital trust in each of the last five years. [8489]

Mr. Horam: Information on the average daily number of available beds by broad ward classification for each national health service trust is published annually in "Bed Availability for England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Consultants

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many consultants who practise in the NHS also undertake private work; and what proportion of their time is spent in that private work. [8493]

(2) how many consultant sessions used for treating NHS patients are currently funded by academic institutions. [8480]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not available centrally.

Time on waiting list for surgical specialties

	6 months	6 to 11 months	12 to 17 months	18 to 23 months	24 months+	All durations
Oral surgery	337	144	49	22	12	564
Paediatric dentistry	60	8	1	2	0	71
Neurosurgery	123	95	47	32	50	347
Plastic surgery	845	769	513	289	136	2,552
Cardiac surgery	333	157	25	6	0	521
Paediatric surgery	490	334	244	132	141	1,341
Thoracic surgery	102	46	22	13	0	183
Anaesthetics	301	153	57	1	3	515
Total waiters[1]	13,421	6,578	1,999	751	453	23,202
Percentage of total waiters	57.84	28.35	8.62	3.24	1.95	100.00

[1] Includes a total of 351 cases who were awaiting elective admission to surgical specialties having previously self deferred.

Water Leakages

27. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated current loss of water in the water supply system in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [7342]

Mr. Moss: Total losses of water in the water supply system in Northern Ireland are currently estimated to be 10.95 cu m per kilometre of main per day.

Terrorism

29. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the capability of the Provisional IRA to mount a terrorist campaign. [7344]

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the current level of IRA terrorist risk. [7329]

Sir John Wheeler: Our assessment is that the Provisional IRA is capable of mounting a sustained terrorist campaign both in Northern Ireland and elsewhere and that there is currently a high risk of attack from PIRA. The security forces remain vigilant to prevent such attacks, and have achieved a number of important recent successes.

Sectarian Killings

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on sectarian killings which have taken place in the last 12 months. [7339]

Sir John Wheeler: There have been 17 murders in Northern Ireland between 10 December 1995 and 10 December 1996 arising from the security situation, of which two are believed to have had a purely sectarian motive. These, like all murders, are cruel crimes without any justification, and the Government condemn them unreservedly.

Every effort will be made to bring those responsible for these and all other crimes to justice. To date, one person has been charged in connection with one of the sectarian murders.

Traffic (Comber)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the last traffic census was conducted on roads leading to Comber, County Down; and what is the volume of traffic on each road at Comber. [8336]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Roads Service under its chief executive, Mr. W. J. McCoubrey. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from G. P. Fraser to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 11 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked the Chief Executive of Roads Service to reply to your question about volumes of traffic on roads leading to Comber. In the Chief Executive's absence I am responding on his behalf.

Roads Service has automatic traffic counters which constantly record traffic volumes on three roads leading to Comber. Traffic information from these counters for 1995 was as follows:–

Location	Average daily traffic flow
A21 Newtownards Road	14,550
A22 Killyleagh Road	6,640
A22 Comber Road, Dundonald	8,840

I hope you find this information helpful.

Manse Road, Castlereagh

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the arrangements for salting Manse road, Castlereagh; what account is taken of whether the road is used by school buses in making such arrangements; what was the cost of salting Manse road *(a)* in 1995–96 and *(b)* in 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [8337]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Roads Service under its chief executive, Mr. W. J. McCoubrey. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from G. P. Fraser to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 11 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked the Chief Executive of Roads Service to reply to your question about arrangements for salting Manse Road, Castlereagh. In the Chief Executive's absence I am responding on his behalf.

There are 2 Manse Roads in Castlereagh—the C369 which runs from the Four Winds roundabout to the Ballygowan Road, and the U193 which runs from the Clontonacally Road to the Saintfield Road. During periods of ice and snow the C369 is salted along its

entire length together with the section of the U193 from Cadger Road to Saintfield Road. The recent review of the gritted network had no effect on either of these roads.

While school bus routes are not automatically salted Roads Service applies a weighting factor for buses when assessing the traffic flow on each route. By way of illustration, a 40 seater bus is considered equivalent to 20 cars.

The estimated cost of salting these roads was as follows:

Financial year	*C369* £	*U193* £
1995–96	1,000	680
1996–97 (to date)	380	260

I hope you find this information helpful.

Motor Cyclists

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on changes to driver licensing for motor cyclists in Northern Ireland. [8686]

Mr. Moss: Revised licensing arrangements for motor cyclists are being introduced under the second EC directive on the driving licence. The directive, which applies in Northern Ireland on the same basis as in the rest of the United Kingdom, except where required by existing differences in the two licensing systems, requires member states to have two motor cycle driving licence categories and associated tests. These will come into effect on 1 January 1997 by virtue of regulations made by the Department on 21 November 1996.

The category A test will require a rider to take the driving test on a motor cycle over 120cc but not more than 125cc and capable of a speed of 100 km per hour. On passing the test, a rider will be restricted for two years to motor cycles with a power output of up to 25kW or a power to weight ratio not exceeding 0.16 kW-kg. Thereafter the rider will have access to any size of machine. The existing category A test, which allows a person to take a test on a motor cycle up to 250cc, will continue until 30 June 1997. A rider passing his test on such a machine in this period will have immediate access to any size of machine.

The sub-category A1 test will permit a driving test to be taken on a motorcycle of at least 75cc but not more than 120cc and passing this test will confer entitlement to drive a motorcycle of up to 125cc with a power output not exceeding 11kW.

A motor cyclist who passes the driving test on an automatic or semi-automatic machine will be restricted to similar machines. The minimum age for driving motorcycles will remain 17.

Waiting Lists (Royal Victoria Hospital)

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patients are on the waiting lists for elective surgery at the Royal Victoria hospital in Belfast. [7322]

Mr. Moss: At 30 September 1996, which is the latest date for which information is available, 7,036 patients were waiting for elective surgery at the Royal Victoria hospital. Of this number, only 226 or 3.2 per cent. had been waiting more than 18 months.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Publicity

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department has spent on promotional or public information campaigns in each of the last five years; and how much he estimates will be spent on these campaigns during the (i) current and (ii) next financial year. [7533]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the table

Year	*Total spent* £
1991–92	17,546,566
1992–93	19,510,968
1993–94	18,333,603
1994–95	20,054,914
1995–96	20,085,672
1996–97	20,209,043

[1] Estimate.

Child Support Agency

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost to public funds of his Department's nationwide radio advertisement about the Child Support Agency. [7645]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The only nationwide radio advertisements about the Child Support Agency took place around the time of the agency's launch in April 1993. The cost was £107,746 in 1992–93 and £197,268 in 1993–94.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received on the subject of the reduced earnings allowance; how many of these were in support of the allowance; and if he will make a statement. [7904]

Mr. Roger Evans: As at 30 November, the Department had received 263 letters from 155 hon. Members and approximately 300 from individual members of the public and organisations.

The letters generally have expressed concern or sought clarification.

National Insurance

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the yield of an additional *(a)* 0.5 per cent. and *(b)* 1 per cent. on the top rates of national insurance contributions paid by (i) employees, (ii) employers and (iii) the self-employed, at 1995–96 prices and contribution rates, in the years (1) 2000–01, (2) 2010–11, (3) 2020–21 and (4) 2030–31. [8250]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table:

Great Britain accruals £ billions in 1995–96 prices

	2000–01	*2010–11*	*2010–21*	*2030–31*
(a) 0.5 per cent NIC increase				
Employees	1.20	1.40	1.50	1.55
Employers[1]	1.55	1.95	2.35	2

Great Britain accruals £ billions in 1995–96 prices

	2000–01	2010–11	2010–21	2030–31
Self-employed[2]	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10
(b) 1 per cent. NIC increase				
Employees	2.45	2.80	3.05	3.10
Employers[1]	3.15	3.95	4.70	5.30
Self-employed[2]	0.15	0.20	0.20	0.20

Notes:

[1] Includes class 1A contributions paid by employers on cars and car fuel.

[2] Increase applies to self-employed class 4 national insurance contributions.

Class 1 earnings limits and class 4 profits limits assumed to rise in line with prices.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of additional national insurance contribution revenue from employees and employers by 1995–96 if both the lower and upper earnings limits for contribution had been increased annually in relation to earnings since 1979–80. [7897]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Great Britain (accruals)

£ billions

	Loss in revenue
1990–91	–0.85
1991–92	–1.15
1992–93	–1.45
1993–94	–1.55
1994–95	–1.90
1995–96	–2.35

Notes:

1. Assumes that contracted-out rebates in respect of occupational pension schemes apply between the revised lower and upper earnings limits.

2. Assumes that the three brackets for employers contributions increase in line with the rise in the revised lower earnings limits.

3. The overall effect would have been a loss of revenue.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department

Disability Discrimination Act

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans his Department has to monitor the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in relation to indirect discrimination in the provision of goods and services. [7891]

Mr. Burt: The Disability Discrimination Act addresses indirect discrimination in two ways. First, the Act states that discrimination occurs when a service provider, for a reason which relates to a disabled person's disability, treats him less favourably than he treats or would treat others to whom that reason does not or would not apply, and that treatment cannot justified.

Secondly, the Act requires service providers to make reasonable adjustments to make their services more accessible to disabled customers.

The Government will monitor the Disability Discrimination Act in order to assess its effectiveness in combating discrimination. The National Disability Council will also advise the Government on matters relevant to the elimination of discrimination and the operation of the Act.

War Widows

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will make a statement on his future plans for rent allowances for war widows; [8660]

(2) how many war widows currently receive rent allowances. [8661]

Mr. Heald: The abolition of war widow's rent allowance for future claims has been proposed in a package of simplification measures. On 26 November 1996 a letter giving full details of the proposals was sent to all members of the Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions who have until 17 January 1997 to respond. No decision will be taken on this proposal, or any other, until the views of the committee have been fully considered. Existing recipients of rent allowance will be unaffected by the proposal. At the end of September 1996, 1,060 war widows were receiving the allowance.

War Pensioners

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many war pensioners have been affected by the changes in war pension entitlement to pensioners with less than 20 per cent. hearing impairment since 1993. [8664]

Mr. Heald: From April 1993, the date from which figures are first available, to the end of September 1996, a total of 57,176 claims have been received in which the assessment of disablement due to noise induced sensorineural hearing loss was assessed at less than 20 per cent.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of reports from the War Pensions Agency on the success rate of the Royal British Legion in its dealings with war pensioners; and what action he has taken on the basis of his assessment. [8731]

Mr Heald: The War Pensions Agency does not maintain records on the success rate of the Royal British Legion in its dealings with war pensioners.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will now publish in full the revised medical opinion that determined the Government's proposals to alter in future the rules governing hearing loss deterioration in respect of war pension entitlement. [8732]

Mr. Heald: A copy of the texts of the medical advisor's address to the Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions and the medical references on which the change in medical opinion is based have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the changes he announced on 5 December to war disability pensions will be implemented. [8848]

Mr. Heald: There are two entirely separate and unconnected war pensions changes. The first is a package of measures to simplify the administration of war pensions which, subject to consultation with the Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions, will be introduced from 1 April 1997. The second is a change in medical opinion on the effect that noise induced sensorineural hearing loss has on a subsequent hearing loss due to other causes such as aging.

Assessments made from 16 December 1996 will be based on the new medical opinion. Awards made prior to that date on the basis of the old medical advice will continue. The Secretary of State and my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary have decided to use the powers in the dispensing instruments to make awards on the old basis, where claims had been made before 1 March 1996, the date by which the departmental medical adviser considers medical opinion had conclusively changed.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what medical peer review procedures were applied to proposed changes to the rules for war disablement claims for deafness. [8729]

Mr. Heald: The previous war pensions approach to noise induced sensorineural hearing loss was exceptional in recognising the possibility of an increase in service-related hearing loss after removal from the service noise. To confirm or refute that approach, the scientific and medical basis of noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss was investigated first by studying the scientific literature and then by consultation and discussion with some of the UK's leading clinicians and audiological scientists.

Experts included departmental regional consultants appointed by the Department's chief medical adviser on the basis of their authority, and senior academics of the Medical Research Council Institutes of Hearing at Nottingham and Glasgow, and audiological scientists at the Institute of Sound and Vibration Research, Southampton.

Mr. Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy not to introduce the new rules for war disablement claims until the peer review of the new medical opinion for deafness has been published. [8730]

Mr. Heald: Where medical matters need to be determined on a claim for, or application for review of, an award of a war disablement pension, the law requires that part of the claim to be determined by a medical officer appointed by the Secretary of State. The medical officer certifies whether the disablement is due to or aggravated by service in the armed forces, and the degree of disablement due to service. The Secretary of State is required to make payments of war disablement pension in accordance with the certified level of disablement.

It was previously thought that a service-related noise-induced hearing loss could increase the effect of a subsequent hearing loss due to other causes such as aging. Authoritative medical opinion is now that such interaction does not occur and that the maximum effect of service-related hearing loss is at release from service. Medical officers must apply current medical opinion. For them to do otherwise would be unlawful.

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library a copy of the medical evidence on which he has based his decision no longer to grant higher rates of the disability pension in respect of deafness to those already in receipt of war benefit. [8875]

Mr. Heald: A copy of the texts of the medical advisor's address to the Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions and the medical references on which the change in medical opinion is based have been placed in the Library.

Housebuilding

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the impact on employment levels in the housebuilding sector of changes in the national insurance status of operatives; and if he will withdraw the booklet, "Are Your Workers Employed or Self-Employed?" [8325]

Mr. Heald: A wide range of representatives bodies from the construction industry, including from the housebuilding industry, were involved in joint consultations with officials from the Department and the Inland Revenue prior to publication of the booklet, which was at the request of the industry. We have continued to consult across the industry and, in response to the issues they raised, published on 19 November a joint Inland Revenue and Contributions Agency press release, copies of which are available in the Library. This detailed the further steps that were being taken to help the construction industry to review the employment status of their workers in line with the same general rules that apply to other industries. We have no plans to withdraw the booklet.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when next he intends to meet housebuilders to discuss the implications of the change in the status from self-employed to employed for national insurance purposes of operatives in the housebuilding industry; and what assessment he has made of the costs which this change will impose on the sector. [8324]

Mr. Heald: My hon. Friends the Members for Fylde (Mr. Jack) and for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) and I met representatives of the construction industry on 21 November. The housebuilders were invited to be present or to ensure that their views were represented. The further steps the Inland Revenue and the Contributions Agency are taking to help the construction industry review the employment status of their workers were discussed and welcomed. Departmental officials will continue to liaise with the industry and keep me advised.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the average pensioner's income for each year since 1979 by decile group. [8802]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

Median average net income before housing costs for each decile of the all pensioner units income distribution

£ per week/July 1994 prices

Year	*Decile 1*	*Decile 2*	*Decile 3*	*Decile 4*	*Decile 5*	*Decile 6*	*Decile 7*	*Decile 8*	*Decile 9*	*Decile 10*
1979	51.60	57.60	62.30	65.70	69.20	73.20	79.70	92.40	122.70	209.30
1981	54.30	62.10	66.20	69.00	72.50	77.20	83.40	97.40	126.50	229.60
1987	56.20	65.50	73.00	77.30	82.90	88.80	98.20	119.60	161.20	294.90
1988	54.40	64.50	73.10	76.90	82.00	88.20	100.00	124.40	173.40	323.50
1989	52.20	63.30	71.50	76.60	81.20	87.00	100.80	126.70	164.60	304.50
1990	55.30	64.50	72.00	76.80	82.70	89.40	106.30	130.80	179.30	329.10
1990–91	55.80	65.50	73.20	78.70	84.50	93.80	112.00	138.90	187.10	346.10
1992	59.50	70.40	79.20	84.30	90.60	101.30	119.40	144.80	248.00	365.20
1993	62.30	72.20	82.60	88.70	95.30	104.50	121.70	149.70	188.90	358.30
1994–95	66.20	75.60	84.20	92.50	99.90	110.40	128.30	150.00	197.70	373.10

Notes:

1. The estimates refer to all pensioner units. A pensioner unit is defined to be either a single person over state pension age, or a couple where the head, assumed to be the man, is aged over state pension age.
2. The deciles used are the 10 deciles of the before housing costs equivalised net income distribution for all pensioner units. The estimates of average income for each decile are estimates of the median before housing costs unequivalised net income of that decile. This methodology is that used to create table 5 of the Pensioners' Incomes Series publication. This methodology may create an anomaly as some pensioner units will be in a different equivalised decile from their unequivalised decile, thus making it possible, although unlikely, for a higher equivalised decile to have a lower median unequivalised income.
3. Due to the use of estimates of unequivalised income, variations in the median income of deciles may reflect changes in the relative numbers of single pensioners and pensioner couples in that decile. As an example, the median income level of a decile may rise due to an increase in the relative numbers of pensioner couples in the decile rather than a general rise in income levels.
4. Estimates for 1979, 1981, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1992 and 1993 refer to that particular calendar year. The estimate for 1990–91 is an estimate based on data from both 1990 and 1991, as part of the 1991 data had to be omitted due to an error arising from the delayed issue of community charge bills. The estimate for 1994–95 refers to the financial year.
5. Estimates from the pensioners' incomes series are subject to wide margins of error. In particular comparisons of estimates from different years may not give reliable results. It is therefore recommended that estimates are used to indicate trends over time and that year on year comparisons should be avoided.

Source:

The Pensioners' Incomes Series 1994–95, which is based mainly on family expenditure survey data. All estimates are pounds per week in July 1994 prices, rounded to the nearest £0.10.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the real increase in pensioner income since 1979 broken down for each decile group. [8801]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Decile of the before housing costs equivalised net income distribution for all pensioner units	*Real growth in median unequivalised income 1979 to 1994–95 (per cent.)*
1	26
2	31
3	35
4	41
5	44
6	51
7	61
8	62
9	61
10	78

Notes:

1. The estimates refer to all pensioner units. A pensioner unit is defined to be either a single person over state pension age, or a couple where the head, assumed to be the man, is aged over state pension age.
2. The deciles used are the 10 deciles of the before housing costs equivalised net income distribution for all pensioner units. The growth rates for each decile are based on estimates in July 1994 prices for the calendar year 1979 and the financial year 1994–95 of the median before housing costs unequivalised net income of that decile. This methodology is that used to create table 5 of the Pensioners' Incomes Series 1994–95 publication. This methodology may create an anomaly as some pensioner units will be in a different equivalised decile from their unequivalised decile, thus making it possible, although unlikely, for a higher equivalised decile to have a lower median unequivalised income.
3. Due to the use of estimates of unequivalised income, variations in the median income of deciles may reflect changes in the relative numbers of single pensioners and pensioner couples in that decile. As an example, the median income level of a decile may rise due to an increase in the relative numbers of pensioner couples in the decile rather than a general rise in income levels.

Source:

The Pensioners' Incomes Series 1994–95, which is based mainly on family expenditure survey data. All estimates are rounded to the nearest whole percentage point.

Benefits Agency (Doctors)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to change the criteria currently used for the recruitment of doctors employed by the Benefits Agency. [9137]

Mr. Burt: I have today approved proposals for the Benefits Agency to trial new arrangements for the recruitment of full-time medical advisers involved in dealing with claims for incapacity benefit. Operational experience so far has indicated that experience in particular areas of medicine is as important as more general clinical experience of the assessment of capacity for work. The initiative will provide the agency with the opportunity to test out the possibilities of operating some flexibility to ensure a continuing capability to recruit appropriate medical support.

The trial will take place in Newcastle and in the Manchester and Merseyside area, and involve the recruitment of up to 20 doctors. Applicants will be required to have three years post-registration experience, including at least one year in general practice and at least six months experience of psychiatry or rehabilitation-occupational health medicine rather than the current five years general practice experience currently required. All doctors recruited under the trials will undergo the current rigorous training and approval process and receive additional monitoring as part of the evaluation of the trials.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 13 December 1996.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Maize

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what actions he is taking to ensure that genetically modified maize is not marketed in the United Kingdom without the express authority of the Committee on Novel Foods and Processes. [8879]

Mrs. Browning: Decisions on marketing of genetically modified organisms are taken on an EU-wide basis. The advice of the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes was taken into account in formulating the United Kingdom position on genetically modified maize and has been passed on to the EU Scientific Committee for Food which is currently advising the Commission on this matter.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures the Government are taking to ensure that genetically modified maize is not mixed with normal maize gluten feed; and if he will make a statement. [8880]

Mrs. Browning: Importers and distributors of maize and maize products have been informed that it is currently illegal to market unprocessed genetically modified maize in the United Kingdom.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Employment Schemes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people after leaving (1) national training awards, (2) new workers scheme, (3) North Norfolk Action, (4) other education initiative, (5) old job training scheme, (6) open learning credit, (7) other occupational training, (8) open tech learning, (9) one-to-one, (10) placing, assessment and counselling teams, (11) placing and advisory service, (12) Professional and Executive Recruitment, (13) promotion of tourism scheme, (14) Prince's Youth Business trust, (15) Remploy, (16) Skill Choice, (17) sheltered-supported employment, (18) Small Firms Advisory Service, (19) small firms employment subsidy, (20) small firms information service, (21) small firms loan guarantee scheme, (22) small firms service, (23) single regeneration budget, (24) special schemes for disabled, (25) Skills Training agency, (26) special temporary employment programme, (27) short-time working compensation scheme and (28) training access points, *(a)* went into employment and *(b)* went on to further schemes, including those who left before completion of the scheme, in each year of each scheme's operation; and what type and level of qualification each leaver obtained for each year of the scheme's operation up to the latest available year for which data are available. [8741]

Mr. Paice: The information requested can be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Voluntary-aided Schools

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when she will announce allocations of credit approvals to local education authorities and capital grant to the governors of voluntary-aided schools. [9401]

Mrs. Gillan: Details will be placed in the Library on Monday 16 December.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Westminster Hall (Official Functions)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee how many official functions were held in Westminster Hall during the past year; at what cost; and if he will make a statement on their purpose. [8845]

Mr. Michael J. Martin: Two official events have been held in Westminster Hall this year. The President of the Republic of South Africa addressed Members of both Houses of Parliament on Thursday 11 July and the Lord Chancellor's annual breakfast, following the judges' service in Westminster Abbey, was held on Tuesday 1 October. The cost to the House of Commons works services vote of the event on 11 July was £48,000.

TRANSPORT

Road Signs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to commence the upgrading of the primary route road signs within the M25; and what projections he has made as to the cost of the programme. [8419]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 13 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your question on what estimate he has made of the percentage of road signs which need replacement or repair on the United Kingdom primary route network.

The Highways Agency is responsible for the trunk road network in England. We do not have an estimate at any one time of the number of signs needing repair or replacement for the reasons explained below.

Under the requirements of our Code of Practice for Routine Maintenance our maintenance agents (currently over 80 in number) carry out regular inspections of the highway infrastructure including signing and record defects. These defects will be assessed and a prioritised programme of treatments developed. The agents will attempt to coordinate the programme of treatments for small items such as road signs with other works to secure economies of scale and reduce disruption on the network.

From these investigations our agents will produce a rolling programme of works contracts in the form of both maintenance and improvements to effect any necessary restoration of sign quality. On a network of some 6,500 miles these programmes will be updated very regularly. I can say that our budget over the last 5 years for all road sign and road marking maintenance, but not improvement, has varied between about £10m and £16m per year.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on the condition of road signs in the United Kingdom for which his Department has responsibility; [8417]

(2) what representations he has received in the last year on poor and inadequate road signing in the United Kingdom for which his Department has responsibility. [8421]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 13 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your questions on the condition of road signs on trunk roads in England and representations received in the last year on poor and inadequate road signing.

Signs on the Trunk Road network in England are provided to high standards set out in our Design Manual for Roads and Bridges and proactively maintained to similarly high levels defined in our Code of Practice for Routine Maintenance. In general the condition of our signs is good, they play a full part in the delivery of a safe and efficient network. Safety is always the Agency's foremost consideration and even though funds are limited our maintenance and improvement programmes afford safety measures the highest priority.

Representations about the condition or adequacy of signs may be made to the Agency or directly to our maintenance agents. These are varied and cover both general and local issues. The total number of representations to the Agency this year on all signing matters is approaching some 200, but the number cannot be confirmed precisely at short notice. All of them are investigated promptly and acted upon as necessary. Issues shown to relate to safety are given immediate attention, other longer term measures are prioritised according to wider programme and funding considerations.

Public Transport

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what notification he receives on the progress of co-ordination provided for in section 88 of the Transport Act 1985. [8803]

Mr. Watts: None. The exercise by local authorities of their duties under section 88 of the Transport Act 1985 is not subject to a requirement to report to my Department.

Local Roads and Transport (Capital Allocation)

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce the allocation of capital resources for expenditure on local roads and transport in England for 1997–98. [9469]

Sir George Young: A total of £746 million will be allocated to local highway authorities and passenger transport authorities for capital expenditure on their transport infrastructure in 1997–98. This is in addition to the sums provided for transport schemes that are successful in the capital challenge competition.

Full details of the allocations will be placed in the Library of the House on Monday 16 December.

Vehicle Inspectorate

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library copies of the report produced as part of the prior options review of the Vehicle Inspectorate, evaluating its performance since its establishment as an executive agency, and copies of the revised framework document. [9431]

Mr. Bowis: I have arranged for copies of these documents to be placed in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Oil Pollution

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library copies of the documents submitted to, and discussed by, the Paris Commission on oil pollution discharges from drilling production and storage offshore oil platforms since its establishment; and if he will make a statement on United Kingdom compliance with its agreements on oil pollution. [8355]

Mr. Clappison: The Paris Commission has been in existence for 18 years and in that period has considered a very large volume of papers on the subject of the offshore oil and gas industry. It would cost an unreasonable amount to identify and copy them all. I am placing in the Library a copy of the section on "Oil" of the "Paris Commission Procedures and Decisions Handbook," as amended up to 1994, together with copies of subsequent relevant decisions: this describes the work of the commission in this area.

As far as I am aware, the United Kingdom is in compliance with its international obligations on oil pollution.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he received a copy of the 1994 United Kingdom radioactive waste inventory from Nirex; and what assessment his Department has made of the environmental matters contained in the inventory. [8687]

Mr. Clappison: The Department of the Environment commissions the United Kingdom radioactive waste inventory, jointly with Nirex, to support the development of radioactive waste management policies.

Hillingdon Unitary Development Plan

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has received from Hillingdon borough council to his objections to the council's proposed changes to the Hillingdon borough draft unitary development plan. [8898]

Sir Paul Beresford: I understand from Hillingdon council that it will not pursue its proposals for the Sidmouth drive recreation ground, Ruislip, but that it is still considering the other representations that it has received. Hillingdon is arranging a local inquiry to hear objections to the new issues raised by the proposed modifications, including objections to the housing proposals.

Housing Registration

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the model registration scheme referred to in section 65 of the Housing Act 1996. [9194]

Mr. Clappison: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) on 26 November, *Official Report*, column *147*.

Challenge Funding

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce the winners of the pilot scheme for challenge funding of local authority capital expenditure. [9585]

Mr. Gummer: Of 326 bids submitted earlier this year, 189 bids involving 217 authorities have been selected for support. The challenge fund of £600 million will bring in £1,200 million from other sources, including almost £700 million from the private sector, to spend on local authorities' highest priority capital projects.

Details of individual successful bids will be placed in the Library of the House on Monday 16 December and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration will also be writing to all hon. Members in England.

Mr. Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made with the single regeneration budget challenge fund; when the outcome of round 3 will be announced; and if he will make a statement. [9586]

Mr. Gummer: The single regeneration budget challenge fund has been a great success and is a tribute to the enthusiasm and commitment of the local partnerships which have put forward bids and are running schemes. For the third round, there has been an even higher standard of bids than previously in both the quality of the proposals submitted and how they are presented. This is reflected in a success rate of nearly 60 per cent. for those submitting final bids. In particular, about a quarter of recommended bids have come from previously unsuccessful partnerships.

Taken together, schemes supported by the three rounds of the challenge fund will transform hundreds of localities for the better, and substantially improve the quality of life for local communities. Projected results for the lifetime of the 550 schemes supported by rounds 1 to 3 include more than 650,000 jobs created or safeguarded, more than 500,000 people trained and obtaining qualifications, more than 90,000 business starts, more than 250,000 dwellings built or improved and more than 40,000 voluntary groups supported.

The challenge fund has continued to encourage local partnerships. I am particularly pleased that the voluntary sector and local communities are increasingly involved in challenge fund schemes. This is partly a result of efforts by Government offices for the regions, strengthening the national bidding guidance and the dissemination of information through organisations such as the Community Development Foundation, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Commission for Racial Equality.

The challenge fund aims to make public and private resources work together more effectively to support local strategies for regeneration. Regeneration needs to address local needs and opportunities across the board. I have therefore been impressed by the way in which bidders have linked their bids to other regeneration activity, notably that supported by training and enterprise councils, European structural funds, the national lottery and regeneration programmes such as English Partnerships and urban development corporations. Bidders have also taken account of the Government's competitiveness and sustainability agendas and local strategies, including those relating to housing and health.

It is important that challenge fund schemes deliver the results and benefits which they have promised to local people. For that reason, we shall continue to place a strong emphasis on the effective management and monitoring of schemes, introducing improvements where necessary.

There will be a fourth round of the SRB challenge fund in 1997–98 along the same lines as earlier rounds, with guidance to bidders issued in the new year.

Analysis of round 3

For the third round, there were marginally fewer final bids compared with round 2—310 as against 329—but marginally more successful bids—182 as against 172.

The cost to the SRB of the 182 recommended bids is currently estimated at £44.8 million in year 1, 1997–98, and over the lifetime of bids, that is up to seven years, would amount to £897 million overall. These figures are provisional and are subject to detailed confirmation following further discussions between GORs and successful bidders.

There is a good spread of successful bids across the SRB objectives, with most bids having multiple objectives. It is noteworthy that over 90 per cent. of the bids are focused on employment and education objectives, over 70 per cent. of the bids have economic development as an objective, 53 per cent. of bids include elements focused specifically on ethnic minority communities, nearly 50 per cent. of bids have housing as an objective and 65 per cent. of bids have crime prevention and community safety as an objective.

The attraction of private investment is an important objective of most SRB challenge fund schemes. As with earlier rounds, successful round 3 bids stand to attract about £2.50 in private investment for every £1 in challenge fund support.

Effective involvement of a range of key partners is at the heart of the challenge fund approach. There is private sector involvement in 83 per cent. of recommended bids, with local authority and training and enterprise council involvement at 91 per cent. and 81 per cent. respectively. Voluntary sector involvement in bids has continued to increase: it now stands at 59 per cent. There has also been a very large increase in the number of bids that include promotion of initiatives of benefit to ethnic minorities as an explicit objective, up to 53 per cent. from 37 per cent. in the second round. In addition, given the location of bids, ethnic minorities will benefit from a much higher proportion of bids even though they are not specifically intended as the beneficiaries.

Most bids are concentrated on small areas, with 59 per cent. covering areas with a population under 25,000. This is slightly up on the first two rounds of the challenge fund, and chimes with the advice given in the bidding guidance to concentrate resources in order to make a significant impact. About 5 per cent. of bids are region-wide.

Details of the 182 individual bids which have been successful in round 3 will be placed in the Library of the House on Monday 16 December and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration will also be writing to all hon. Members in England.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Women

Ms Janet Anderson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to measure and evaluate the effects of his Department's policies on women. [5476]

Mr. Bates: In July of this year, the model guidance on policy appraisal for equal treatment was revised and circulated at Cabinet level for Departments to adapt to their own circumstances. The guidance has been circulated to all senior officials in my Department with a view to incorporating it in the policy development process.

DEFENCE

Overseas Training Deployments

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for Royal Air Force deployments to Yuma Marine Corps air station, Arizona. [8596]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 12 March 1996, *Official Report*, column *509*.

Air Training Corps

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria in respect of (i) numbers of actively attending (ii) personnel and (iii) other factors must be met by *(a)* the Air Training Corps and *(b)* the Army Cadet Force in order to qualify for capital grants to maintain and improve facilities. [8086]

Mr. Soames: In order to qualify for capital grants to maintain and improve facilities, cadet force units must be viable, or in the case of new detachments or in certain other cases, be expected to become viable. A viable unit would normally have between 25 and 30 cadets attending, but in rural communities where no other youth activity exists a figure of approximately 12 is acceptable. Each unit must have at least one qualified adult instructor, and must have an adult female on the staff if female cadets are enrolled. The expenditure would be approved only if it would result in the accommodation occupied being suitable for training—with all the necessary facilities, such as classrooms, toilets and secure storage—accessible to cadets, and complaint with the requirements of both health and safety and fire prevention regulations.

Danish Tour Guide (killing)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what compensation has been paid by Her Majesty's Government to the family of the murdered Danish tour guide in Cyprus; and if he will make a statement. [8716]

Mr. Soames: Issues of individual privacy arise in this tragic case, but people have the same compensation rights against the Ministry of Defence as they have against any other employer or organisation.

Boarding School Allowance

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the total number of *(a)* officer ranked personnel and *(b)* other ranked personnel currently serving in Her Majesty's armed forces whose children benefit from the service children's boarding school allowance. [8946]

Mr. Soames: The total average number of officers whose children benefited from boarding school allowance in the academic year 1995–96 was 4,340; the number of other ranks for the same period was 2,525. Detailed statistics for the current term can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Income Support

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the additional administrative cost if all retirement pensioners eligible for income support in 1995–96 had successfully claimed it. [8249]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is not available. The additional administrative cost of processing and maintaining income support claims, had all pensioners chosen to take up their entitlement in 1994–95, is estimated to lie between £29 million and £39 million.

War Disablement Pensions

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the respects in which the new medical information advanced as the basis for the change in the rules governing war disablement pension in respect of deafness differs from that set out in the sensorineural hearing loss medical appendix, paragraph 12.2, issued by the Department of Social Security; and when that appendix was first issued. [8948]

Mr. Heald: Medical appendices summarise the consensus of current medical opinion on the particular topic. They emphasise the aetiology of the condition. That on sensorineural hearing loss, issued in 1993, to which the question refers, describes the various causes of that condition, including noise. Paragraph 12.2 refers to the process by which noise damages hearing. It states that once exposure to excessive loss has ceased, the hearing loss resulting from that noise exposure does not of itself worsen.

The appendix does not, however, deal with the effect of a noise-induced hearing loss on any subsequent hearing loss, which is the subject of the recent development in understanding. It was previously thought that an existing service-related noise-induced hearing loss could intensify the effect of a subsequent hearing loss due to other causes, such as aging. Authoritative medical opinion is now that such interaction does not occur, and that the effect of a service-related noise-induced hearing loss is at its greatest at release from service.

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many war disablement pensioners have had their entitlement in respect of deafness (i) reduced and (ii) ended to date; and what estimate he has made of the number whose entitlement will be *(a)* reduced and *(b)* ended in (1) 1996–97 and (2) 1997–98 in consequence of the rate changes announced on 5 December. [9032]

Mr. Heald: No war pensioner has had, or will have, his pension reduced or ended as a result of the change in medical opinion announced on 5 December 1996.

Maladministration

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on arrangements which have been made to allow the consideration of financial redress where maladministration has occurred. [9584]

Mr Roger Evans: The Department of Social Security is committed to making its services more responsive to the needs of its customers, operating to set standards and offering redress where appropriate. Since 1977 the Department has operated arrangements whereby financial redress can be made to a customer who has experienced a pecuniary loss through maladministration. These arrangements have been periodically updated to reflect the changes to both the structure of the benefit administration and the expectations of the public. A major revision of the arrangements has recently been completed which has embraced the principles contained in Office of Public Service guidance to Departments and agencies and which responds to concerns raised by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration.

The revised arrangements provide the basis for a consistent approach to complaints across agencies. The guidance adopts a more sympathetic attitude to cases where official error has occurred but no financial loss has been experienced and ensures more equitable treatment in the consideration of compensation payments when moneys properly due have been delayed. The arrangements continue to strive to make allowances for the differing circumstances of each case.

The arrangements will take effect from 1 January 1997. A copy of "Financial Redress for Maladministration," which provides detailed guidance, has been placed in the Library.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current level of arrears in maintenance payments remaining to be collected by the Child Support Agency; and if he will make a statement. [7909]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 12 December 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency arrears.

The amount of Full Maintenance Assessment arrears remaining to be collected by the Child Support Agency at 30 November 1996 was 433,774,491. Of this amount, approximately £262 million is the subject of agreed arrangements for repayment by instalments, which are closely monitored. The Agency is making every effort through the full range of powers available to it to secure payment of the balance.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the accuracy rate of the assessments made by the Child Support Agency in 1994; and what is the latest available figure. [7908]

Mr. Mitchell: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Miss Ann Chant. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 12 December 1996:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency accuracy rates.

The accuracy of assessments has been the subject of a Secretary of State target since 1995/96 only; exact information for 1994 is not therefore available. Estimates suggest however, that the Agency's accuracy rate at that time was around 50%.

For the current year, the target is to achieve a continuing improvement so that in at least 85% of cases checked in March 1997, the assessment value will be for the correct amount to the last penny. In October 1996 the accuracy rate was 77%, and the Agency remains on course to meet the target.

I hope this is helpful.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Compensation Awards

Mr. Morley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the average time currently taken by courts to collect and pay compensation awards to those victims who have been awarded them; and what proposals he has to review current procedures. [8881]

Mr. Streeter: Information concerning compensation awards is not collected separately. The average time taken by magistrates courts to collect all money due to the court, including fines, fees, costs, compensation awards and contributions to legal aid, at the end of 1995 was 236 days.

My Department chairs an inter-agency working group which was set up May 1995 to identify urgently ways of improving the enforcement of financial penalties including fines, compensation orders and confiscation orders. The group issued good practice guidance on enforcement procedures to the courts in July this year. The group is continuing its work and further guidance will be issued where appropriate.

(3) what medical conditions were to be met by the injections given to Gulf war service men and classified as secret. [8451]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the memorandum that I placed in the Library of the House on Tuesday 10 December, which gives details of the Government's vaccination policy during the Gulf conflict.

Correspondence

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to answer the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, South of 9 September regarding Mr. M. M. Doyle. [8699]

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State will write to the hon. Member about his constituent's case.

Land Access Booklet

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning his Department's booklet on access to Ministry of Defence land; how many copies of this booklet were produced; what was the total cost of production; for what reasons it was withdrawn; and if he will make a statement on his future plans for the booklet. [8790]

Mr. Soames: A booklet which encourages public access to the defence estate and highlights several walks was issued by my Department earlier this year; 250,000 copies were produced at a total cost of £66,000. It has since been discovered that the third map in the Longmoor section of the booklet incorrectly indicates that two footpaths are available to the public at all times. This is not the case, and in view of the potential implications for public safety the booklet has been withdrawn temporarily. Arrangements are in hand to amend all remaining stocks and to advise members of the public of this, providing amended copies of the booklet where appropriate. Action has also been taken to place additional warning signs at the site to advise members of the public of the correct position.

Radiation Experiments

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment his Department has recently made of experiments in respect of the effects on human health of exposure to *(a)* strontium 85, *(b)* isotopes of radioactive iodine, *(c)* palladium 103, *(d)* chromium 51, *(e)* niobium 92M, *(f)* barium 133 and *(g)* plutonium, conducted by (i) his Department, (ii) the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority and (iii) the United States Government in conjunction with the United Kingdom Government, since 1956; and if he will make a statement on his Department's current evaluation of research on the effects of radiation exposure on human health; [8614]

(2) what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the radiotoxicity of (i) methyliodide, (ii) polonium and (iii) calcium 45 and their effects on human health; and if he will set out the conclusions of such experimental research conducted to assess the risks of these radioactive materials. [8611]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member.

Operation Purple Star

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many British merchant vessels were chartered by Her Majesty's Government for Operation Purple Star; and if he will make a statement. [4333]

Mr. Soames *[pursuant to his reply, 26 November 1996, c. 194]:* I regret that due to a typographical error the word "No" was omitted from the start of my answer. Despite the rest of the answer it was not absolutely clear, therefore, that no British registered merchant vessels were chartered by my Department to take part in Operation Purple Star.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Peace Process

10. **Mrs. Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met the Irish Government to discuss the peace process in Northern Ireland. [7325]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: I accompanied my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for part of his meeting with Mr. Bruton and Mr. Spring on 9 December.

12. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on recent progress in the all-party talks. [7327]

16. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest position in the peace process. [7331]

28. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the latest situation relating to the peace process. [7343]

Mr. Ancram: Having agreed the rules of procedure and agenda for the opening plenary the talks are now addressing the issue of decommissioning. We recognise the sensitivities of the issue for participants, but believe early agreement on this and the start of substantive discussions, are now urgent.

Dr. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the use of referendums in the peace process. [7336]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The Government have given an undertaking to put the final outcome of the current negotiations to the people of Northern Ireland for approval in a referendum. The Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc.) Act 1996 includes provision for such a referendum.

Farming Job Losses

11. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the number of jobs lost in the farming industry in Northern Ireland as a consequence of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis. [7326]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: The industry provides the equivalent of 15,900 full-time jobs in beef cattle enterprises. There are a further 2,850 in beef and sheepmeat processing, and 2,000 to 3,000 in ancillary industries.

The export ban has had a greater effect on the Northern Ireland industry than anywhere else in the United Kingdom, because 55 per cent. by volume of Northern Ireland beef used to be exported outside the UK. It is not, however, as yet possible to estimate the jobs lost by this cause.

Beef Production

13. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the value of beef production in Northern Ireland in 1995–96; and what percentage of this total was sold outside the United Kingdom. [7328]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: In 1995, the last full year for which figures are currently available, the farm-gate value, including subsidies, of beef cattle sold in Northern Ireland was £414.4 million. It is estimated that 56 per cent. of this total was sold outside the United Kingdom.

Interrogation Procedures

15. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had with *(a)* the Royal Ulster Constabulary and *(b)* the Lord Chief Justice on reforming interrogation procedures at Castlereagh; and if he will make a statement. [7330]

Sir John Wheeler: Officials in the Northern Ireland Office have been working with the RUC on producing a draft code of practice in connection with the silent video recording of interviews held with terrorist suspects, and we expect to go out to public consultation shortly.

Beef Exports

17. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken since 14 November to secure the removal of the ban on Northern Ireland beef exports. [7332]

Mr. Ancram: All Agriculture Departments have been working on the details of a certified herds scheme along with European Commission officials.

BSE-free Herds

18. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce BSE-free certified herds in Northern Ireland. [7333]

Mr. Ancram: Certified herds are specifically referred to by the Florence agreement as a stage in the removal of the export ban. The Agriculture Departments are actively exploring possibilities for a UK-wide certified herds scheme with the Commission so that we can submit formal proposals shortly. We will be pressing for these to be discussed at the earliest opportunity.

Security Situation

19. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation. [7334]

26. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the current security situation in the Province. [7341]

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Member and my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick) earlier today.

Fish (Lough Neagh)

20. **Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the redd count of migrating fish in the Lough Neagh catchment area for *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96. [7335]

Mr. Ancram: The redd count for salmon in the Lough Neagh catchment area in 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96 was 42, 73 and 55 respectively. It is not possible to provide migratory trout (dollaghan) redd counts as these are indistinguishable from resident brown trout redds.

Irish Language

22. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for improving the educational materials for use in teaching the Irish language. [7337]

Mr. Ancram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 14 November 1996, *Official Report,* column *345.*

Inward Investment

23. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about inward investment in Northern Ireland. [7338]

Mr. Ancram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 14 November, *Official Report,* columns *342-43.* There has been no significant change in the position and I remain confident about increasing interest shown in Northern Ireland as an investment location.

Elective Surgery

25. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the current waiting times for elective surgery for patients in the Eastern health board area. [7340]

Mr. Moss: The following table records the number of those waiting for elective admission at 30 September 1996 in surgical specialties with trusts located in the Eastern health and social services board area together with the time spent on the waiting list at that date.

Time on waiting list for surgical specialties

	6 months	*6 to 11 months*	*12 to 17 months*	*18 to 23 months*	*24 months+*	*All durations*
General surgery	2,603	992	415	130	22	4,162
Urology	1,557	480	192	73	64	2,366
Trauma	2,301	1,583	196	33	15	4,128
ENT	2,085	760	82	9	10	2,946
Ophthalmology	2,284	1,057	156	9	0	3,506

Mr. Jack: The information requested is as follows:

Countries with no personal income tax

Andorra
Bahamas
Brunei
Bahrain
Kuwait
Maldives
Monaco
Naura
Oman
Qatar
United Arab Emirates
Vanuatu.

Countries with limited personal income tax

Antigua [no income tax is levied on residents]
St Kitts and Nevis [no income tax is levied on residents]
Saudi Arabia [income tax is not levied on employment income]
Seychelles [income tax is not levied on employment income]
Korea, north [income tax is levied only on foreign nationals].

Note:

The Government of Grenada proposed to abolish personal income tax with effect from 1 April 1996. This has, however, not yet been implemented.

Dependent territories with no personal income tax

Anguilla [UK]
Ascension [UK]
Bermuda [UK]
British Indian Ocean Territory
Cayman Islands [UK]
Norfolk Island [AUS]
Pitcairn Islands [UK]
Sark [UK]
Tokelau [NZ]
Tristan da Cunha [UK]
Turks and Caicos Islands [UK]
Wallis and Futuna [FR].

Administration Costs

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide a breakdown by civil Department of gross running costs, indicating *(a)* current expenditure on running costs and *(b)* running costs as a percentage of each Department's total expenditure. [8272]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* Running costs provision by departmental grouping for 1990–91 to 1998–99 is shown in table 3.7 of "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1996–97, Cm 3201. Table 2.2 details all expenditure within the control total for each departmental grouping. More detailed information can be found in individual departmental reports, Cm 3202–20.

"Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 1997–98" and 1997 departmental reports, due to be published in March 1997, will contain updated information.

Housebuilding

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the costs for *(a)* employers and *(b)* employees in terms of (i) taxes and (ii) administrative and payroll costs, in the housebuilding sector of the ending of the self-employed status of construction operativesfor Inland Revenue purposes. [8321]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 December 1996]:* Self-employed status has not been ended for construction or building workers. As in all industries, whether someone is employed or self-employed depends on the terms and conditions of the engagement. Contractors will continue to be free to take on workers as self-employed where the terms and conditions of the engagement reflect genuine self-employment.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for how many years construction operatives in the house building sector have been considered to be self-employed for taxation purposes; when, by whom and for what reasons the decision was taken to change that status; and if he will make a statement. [8322]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 December 1996]:* Whether someone is employed or self-employed depends on the terms and conditions of their engagement. This has always been a matter of general law and applies in the same way to the construction industry as it does to all other industries. The primary responsibility for deciding employment status rests with contractors who engage workers. Construction industry representatives expressed concern about the difficulties sometimes met in establishing the employment status of those working in that industry and the implications of this for tax and national insurance. They asked for help with employment status in the industry. In response, the Inland Revenue and Department of Social Security published leaflet IR48, 'Are Your Workers Employed or Self-employed?' This gives guidance to contractors to help them with the question of whether their workers are employed or self-employed.

Public Sector

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the figures upon which each line in chart 1 on page 100 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" is based. [7222]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 2 December 1996]:*

The figures requested are as follows;

	The 1979 public sector		*The public sector*	*The public sector excluding industries now privatised*	*Publicly sponsored capital*
1979	35.7	1979–80	35.4	21.6	21.6
1980	33.4	1980–81	32.1	19.4	19.4
1981	26.7	1981–82	27.2	15.3	15.3
1982	26.5	1982–83	29.5	17.1	17.1
1983	29.5	1983–84	31.0	18.7	18.7
1984	29.2	1984–85	28.9	19.2	19.2

	The 1979 public sector		The public sector	The public sector excluding industries now privatised	Publicly sponsored capital
1985	29.8	1985–86	25.4	17.7	17.7
1986	28.4	1986–87	23.0	16.1	16.1
1987	27.9	1987–88	21.5	15.8	15.8
1988	28.7	1988–89	20.0	14.3	14.3
1989	34.0	1989–90	26.0	20.7	20.7
1990	36.7	1990–91	24.6	20.8	20.8
1991	36.6	1991–92	24.1	22.7	22.7
1992	36.2	1992–93	25.2	23.8	23.8
1993	36.3	1993–94	22.3	21.4	21.5
1994	36.5	1994–95	22.2	21.4	21.6
1995	37.0	1995–96	21.3	20.6	21.0
1996	—	1996–97	19.2	19.2	20.3
1997	—	1997–98	17.2	17.2	19.6
1998	—	1998–99	16.7	16.7	20.2
1999	—	1999–00	16.3	16.3	20.3

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to reply to the letters dated 9 August, 12 September and 24 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Dr. S. Ala-ut Dun. [7287]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 3 December 1996]:* I sent a reply on 11 December 1996.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were local authority capital receipts in each year from 1979–80 to 1995–96 in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland both in (i) nominal terms and (ii) 1996–97 prices. [7823]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* The data requested are given in the table:

£ million

	England		Wales		Scotland		Northern Ireland	
	Nominal	Real[1]	Nominal	Real[1]	Nominal	Real[1]	Nominal	Real[1]
1979–80	663	1,701	18	46	20	51	0	0
1980–81	965	2,093	25	54	39	85	0	0
1981–82	1,615	3,193	97	192	90	178	0	0
1982–83	2,239	4,133	126	233	142	262	1	1
1983–84	1,834	3,235	123	217	162	286	1	2
1984–85	1,789	3,005	128	215	179	301	0	1
1985–86	1,867	2,973	92	146	168	267	0	1
1986–87	2,972	4,593	101	156	186	287	1	1
1987–88	3,818	5,603	125	183	261	383	1	1
1988–89	5,418	7,452	223	307	368	506	1	1
1989–90	5,078	6,528	241	310	438	563	1	1
1990–91	3,257	3,878	123	146	431	513	1	1
1991–92	2,290	2,562	86	96	421	471	2	3
1992–93	2,107	2,262	77	83	423	454	5	5
1993–94	3,502	3,654	154	161	442	461	6	6
1994–95	2,438	2,500	95	97	507	520	7	7
1995–96	2,026	2,026	114	114	463	463	8	8

[1] Real terms figures in 1995–96 prices, the latest completed financial year.

WALES

Children in Care

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the average annual cost of taking a child into local authority care. [8352]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The costs of taking a child into care will include a number of elements, not all of which are necessarily classified in the same way by different local authorities. The average costs for placements may be estimated by taking expenditure throughout the year reported by local authorities and dividing by the average number of children looked after in these placements at the start and end of the year. The latest available average costs calculated on this basis are £6,500 for foster placements and £19,800 for residential and other community placements.

Small Rural Schemes

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he plans to announce his decision on the arrangements for the transfer of funding for small rural schemes from the Welsh Development Agency to local authorities. [9464]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My right hon. Friend announced in March as part of the Rural White Paper, "A Working Countryside for Wales," the Government's intention to transfer funding for small rural schemes from the Welsh Development Agency to local authorities. In September we issued a consultation paper on the proposed arrangements; we received 17 responses, most of which welcomed the proposal.

I have considered the various points made during consultation and decided that £5.4 million will be allocated to the eligible local authorities in 1997–98.

Those authorities are: Isle of Anglesey county council; Carmarthenshire county council; Conwy county borough council; Denbighshire county council; Gwynedd county council; and Pembrokeshire county council.

I have also decided that for 1997–98 the agency will retain £1.4 million of the £6.8 million being transferred in order to meet commitments to the Welsh national botanical gardens and to continue to support the Leader and Interreg II European programme groups. As the agency's commitments start to unwind from the end of 1997–98, an increasing amount will be available to local authorities.

In order to claim the funds, each local authority will need to develop an appropriate scheme which embodies the challenge principle, encourages the levering-in of private sector money and supports local partnerships in local communities.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Mineshafts

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he plans to respond to the Trade and Industry Committee's seventh report, Session 1995–96, on former mineshafts, HC 495; and if he will make a statement. [8942]

Mr. Page: The Committee published the Government's response as an appendix to its second special report on 30 October.

Clean Coal Technology

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) of 4 December, *Official Report*, column 1035, if he will list the 43 companies referred to and the projects in which they have taken part. [8530]

Mr. Page: The following tables set out the 43 companies that have a significant involvement in the clean coal technology programme and the projects in which they have taken part.

Notes:

(a) For ease of reference the projects are grouped under sub-programme technical areas as follows:

0. Collaborative agreements

1. Coal Exploration and Extraction

2. Coal Preparation

3. Coal Handling and Supply

4. Coal Combustion in Conventional Utility Power Generation

5. Advanced Power Generation

6. Other Coal Conversion and Utilisation Processes

7. Technology Transfer and Commercialisation

(b) The list of projects does not include those undertaken directly with universities or where the Department is participating directly in collaborative agreements with overseas organisations. In the latter case UK industry is actively involved in the agreements advising on the work programmes and evaluation of results. These agreements include the International Energy Agency's IEA clean coal centre and coal combustion sciences agreements.

Table 1: Companies with significant involvement in the DTI Clean Coal Programme Projects

Company	*Company reference number*
ABB Kent Taylor	1
AEA Technology plc	2
Aero and Industrial Technology Ltd.	3
Ashwell Engineering	4
Blue Circle Industries	5
BMP Countrywide	6
Bridgewater Paper Company	7
British Coal Corporation	8
British Gas plc	9
British Steel plc	10
CCI International	11
CINAR Ltd.	12
Coalite Products Ltd.	13
Computational Dynamics Ltd.	14
CRE Group Ltd.	15
Diamond Power Speciality Ltd.	16
EB Holmes Agro-Industrial Consultancy	17
European Gas Turbines Ltd.	18
Evergreen Resources (UK) Ltd.	19
FCT International Ltd.	20
FLUENT Europe Ltd.	21
Frankland Consultants Ltd.	22
GEC Alsthom Ltd.	23
Health, Safety and Engineering Consultants Ltd.	24
Hick Hargreaves	25
Hillfarm Coal Company	26
Hydra Tools International plc	27
International Combustion Ltd.	28
International Mining Consultants Ltd.	29
Lodge Sturtevant Ltd.	30
Merchants Ltd.	31
Mitsui Babcock Energy Ltd.	32
National Power plc	33
Optimat Ltd.	34
Particle Consultants	35
PowerGen plc	36
RJB Mining plc	37
Rock Mechanics Technology Ltd.	38
Rolls Royce IRD Ltd.	39
Scottish Power plc	40
Senior Thermal Engineering Ltd.	41
Severn Sciences Ltd.	42
WS Atkins Ltd.	43

Table 2: DTI Clean Coal Programme Projects active since January 1993

Technical area	*Project number*	*Title*	*Companies involved*
0	15	BCURA Joint Funding Agreement	36, 37, 41
0	18	IEA Coal Combustion Programme Participation	2
0	38	EPSRC Joint Funded Research	19, 25, 26, 30, 33, 36
1	36	Control of High Stress & Weak Strata Conditions in Underground Coal Mines	8, 37, 38
1	37	Enhancement of In-Seam Seismic Exploration Techniques	8, 29, 37
1	75	Improved Drainage of Methane Gas	8, 29, 37
1	102	Remote Spectroscopy for On-Line Monitoring	8
1	103	Methane from Rapidly Advancing Drivages	8, 29, 37
1	104	Methane from Abandoned Mines	8, 29, 37
1	108	Coal Fuel Cycle Study	2
1	127	Technical Measures to Control Diesel Exhaust Particulate Emissions in Coal Mines	8, 24
1	132	Mine Climate Control Options in Underground Working Zones	37

Table 2: DTI Clean Coal Programme Projects active since January 1993

Technical area	Project number	Title	Companies involved
1	186	Control of High Stress and Weak Strata Conditions in Underground Coal Mines—Phase 2	8, 37, 38
1	196	Hard Head Continuous Miner—Phased Water Cutting System	27, 37
2	74	Commercial Scale Three-Product LARCODEMS Separator	8
2	139	Maintaining the CRE Coal Bank	15
2	150	Dry Beneficiation of Coal	22
2	151	Chlorine Reduction in UK Coals	15
2	215	Fine Coal De-Watering Centrifuge	37
2	216	Cyclone For Dry Fines Processing	37
3	24	On-Line Moisture Monitoring of Coal on Conveyors	8
3	57	Characterisation of Particle Behaviour in Coal Utilisation Systems	8
3	131	Monitoring and Management of Handlability of Power Station Coals	10, 33, 37
3	179	Pulverised Fuel Flow Meters	1, 40
3	209	On-Line Measurementt of PF Flow/Quality and Carbon in Ash—its present technology status and future development	20, 28, 36
4	14	Collaborative Research to Minimise the Effect of High Temperature Coal Ash Deposition in Pulverised Coal-fired Boilers	8, 16, 32, 33,36
4	22	Thermal NOx Formation in Flames	2, 9
4	31	Mathematical Modelling of Power Station Boilers	2, 33, 36
4	33	Multi-Dimensional Imaging Diagnostics for Combustion (MIDCOM II)	2
4	55	Size Distribution & Maceral Association of Coal Mineral Matter. Effect on Combustion Performance	8
4	69	NOx Reduction by Furnace Air Staging and Reburning	32
4	76	Sulphur Dioxide Reduction by Optimised Dry Sorbent Injection	32
4	77	Fundamentals of Pulverised Coal Heterogeneity	33
4	78	Wire-Mesh Based Standard Test to Characterise Coal	32, 33
4	106	Absorbents for Dry Lime Desulphurisation	32
4	115	Application of Image Analysis Techniques for Characterisation of Coal Burn-Out Propensity	36
4	116	An Intelligent NOx Control System	36
4	117	Flat Flame Burner Studies on Coal Nitrogen Release—A scoping Study	8
4	120	PMRTA Investigation into the Non-Additive Swelling Behaviour of Blends	8, 15
4	124	Reduced Kinetic Schemes for Modelling NO Formation and its Detection using Laser Induced Fluorescence	2
4	125	Coal Reactivity and Emissions Reduction in Pulverised Coal Combustion	15
4	126	Effect of Coal Quality on In-Furnace NOx	32
4	143	Investigation of Advanced Low NOx Burners with Integrated Reburn	32
4	161	1995 Engineering foundation Conference on Ash Deposition	36
4	163	The Effects of Coal Quality on NOx Emissions and Carbon Burn-out in Pulverised Coal-fired Utility Boilers	2, 9, 12, 14, 15, 21, 28, 32, 33, 36
4	192	Co-Firing of Natural Gas with Pulverised Coal	28
4	198	Coal-over-Coal Reburn Testing, Modelling and Plant Feasibility	32
4	199	Development of Coal-over-Coal Reburn	32, 26
4	200	Practical Improvements in Power Plant Efficiency Through Materials Engineering	32
4	201	The Fate of Trace Elements in PF Combustion Systems	15, 36
4	222	Requirements for Materials R&D for Coal-Based Power Plant—Into the 21st Century	8, 18, 32, 39
4	223	Improvement of Combustion Efficiency in Low-NOx Combustion Systems	32
4	225	Behaviour of Coal Blends in Power Station Boilers	32
5	6	IEA HTHP Filer Programme	8, 9, 36
5	11	Grimethorpe Topping Cycle Project	8, 18, 36
5	50	Advanced Gas Cleaning	8, 15
5	56	Coal Characterisation at High Heating Rates	8
5	79	Advanced Compressor Applicable to Gas Turbines	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	80	Environmental Optimisation of the Topping Cycle	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	81	Hot Gas Desulphurisation for Advanced Power Generation	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	82	Co-Gasification of Coal/Sewage Sludge and Gas Turbine Development	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	83	Life Evaluation of Generic Filter Types	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	84	Hot Gas Cleaning Development for Intermediate Temperature Application to Gasification Combined Cycle Processes	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	85	Cleaning Behaviour of Filters for Gasification Combined Cycle Power Systems	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	86	Materials for Gasifier Hot Gas Path Components in Advanced Combined Cycle Power Plants	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	87	Erosion/Corrosion of Advanced Materials for Coal-fired Combined Cycle Power Generation	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	88	Predication of Gasifier Performance	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	89	Removal of NH3 in Coal Gasification Systems	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	90	JOULE I Clean Coal Gasification Systems	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	91	Low NOx Gas Turbine Combustor Development	3, 8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	92	Gas Utilisation Developments	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	93	Sorbent Behaviour in the Topping Cycle	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	94	Pressurised Solids Transport	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	95	Pressurised Gasification Studies	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	96	Disposal of CFBC Ash from the Topping Cycle	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	97	Gasifier Process Specifications	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	98	Fuel Behaviour in the Topping Cycle	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	99	Advanced Power Generation Cycle Assessment	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	100	Cycle Control Studies	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	101	CFBC Issues	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	107	Cold Modelling of a Demonstration-Scale Gasifier	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	110	Cold Model Studies to Specify the Gasifier Base Design for the PIP	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	111	The Effect of Base Geometry on Gasifier Performance	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	121	Dust Characterisation for Hot Gas Filters	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	122	Advanced Methods for Control of Fuel Nitrogen-NOx Emissions in Pressurised Combustion of Coal	

Table 2: DTI Clean Coal Programme Projects active since January 1993

Technical area	Project number	Title	Companies involved
		Derived Fuel Gas8, 18, 23, 32, 36	
5	123	Integrated Hot Gas Fuel Cleaning for Advanced Gasification Combined-Cycle Processes	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	129	Hot Fuel Gas Dedusting Downstream of Sorbent-Based Gas Cleaning Processes	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	130	Gasifier Control for Clean Power Systems	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	133	Model Predictions for a Prototype Integrated Plant and Utility Systems	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	134	Alternative Gasifier Study	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	135	Effects of Contaminants on Materials Performance in Industrial Gas Turbines for Advanced Combined-Cycle Power Plants8, 18, 23, 32, 36	
5	136	PowerGen Contributions to Development of the ABGC Prototype Plant Design Specification	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	137	Dynamic Modelling of the ABGC Prototype Integrated Plant	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	141	Characterisation of a Gas Turbine Combustor Prototype Design for ABGC Plant	3, 8, 18, 23, 32,36
5	142	Design of a Gas Turbine Combustion System to the ABGC Pilot Integrated Plant	3, 8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	147	Hot Gas Particulate Clean-Up: Current Technological and Commercial Status	35
5	149	Integration Study for APG Cycles using Coal Gasification & Coal Hydrogenation with Solid Oxide & Molten Carbonate Fuel Cells	9
5	152	Initial Engineering of the PIP into the Host Site	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	153	Systems Development of the PIP—Phase I	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	158	The Optimisation of the Sulphide to Sulphate Conversion in the CFBC	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	162	Char Combustion Test for Development of ABGC PIP	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	164	Systems Development of the ABGC PIP—Phase II	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	165	Compilation and Issue of an Interim Report on the Air Blown Gasification Cycle for the Prototype Integrated Plant	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	166	Controlling the Emissions of NH3 from the British Coal Air Blown Gasifier	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	168	Hot Gas Cleaning Specification Guidelines	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	170	Advanced Gas Turbine Compressor Project—Phase 2	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	175	Development of Improved Stable Catalysts and Trace Element Capture for Hot Gas Cleaning	8, 15, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	176	The Role of Mineral Matter in Gasification and Combustion Reactivity of Coal Blends	15
5	180	Alternative Sulphur Retention Scheme for the ABGC	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	181	Air Versus Oxygen Blown Gasification	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	185	The Control of Sulphur and Heavy Metal Species in Coal Gasification Combined Cycle Power Plant	8, 15
5	187	Synergistic Effects and Heavy Metal Partitioning in Co-gasification	8, 15
5	190	Engineering and Costing of a PIP into a Host Site and Greenfield Base Option	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	194	Publicity Material for Advanced Power Technologies	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
5	218	Materials Performance Review of the ABGC Pilot Integrated Plant	8, 18, 23, 32, 36
6	29	Coal Liquefaction Project Phase IV(b)	8

Table 2: DTI Clean Coal Programme Projects active since January 1993

Technical area	Project number	Title	Companies involved
6	34	Industrial Low NOx Axial Swirl Coal Burner	32
6	47	Emissions of Environmental Concern for Coal Utilisation	8, 15
6	49	Utilisation and Publication of Emission Monitoring Database	8, 15
6	58	On-Line Condition Monitoring in Coal Utilisation	8
6	70	Predictive Indices for Coal Performance	8, 15, 33
6	71	Improved Characterisation of Coals for Carbonisation	8, 10, 15
6	72	Combustion Behaviour under Blast Furnace Conditions	8, 10, 15
6	73	Control of NOx Emissions from Stoker-fired Boilers	32
6	105	Optimised Control of Coal-fired Boilers	15
6	113	Development of Improved Techniques for Assessing Pressures Produced by Coals During Carbonisation	10
6	114	Influence of Coal Properties on Combustion Behaviour Under Blast Furnace Conditions—ECSC Steel Executive	8,10,15
6	116	Coal Use in the UK Cement Industry—A scooping Study to Assess R&D Requirements	5,43
6	119	Study into Toxic Organic Compounds from Combustion	8,15
6	140	Techniques for Monitoring the Consistency of Bed-blended Feedstocks	10
6	146	Low Cost Pollution Abatement for Industrial Coal-fired Plant	4, 7, 8, 15, 42
6	160	Utilisation of Ash from Industrial Boilers	7, 11, 15
6	174	Enhanced Use of Low Cost Materials in Cooking Blends by Briquetting	10. 15
6	202	Upgrading of Coal Ashes and Desulphurisation Residues to High Value Products	32, 34
7	193	Scooping Study for the Transfer of Technologies in Domestic and Semi-industrial Coal-Use Markets	4, 15
7	197	Tianjin Smokeless Coal Project	13, 31
7	212	Export Directory of UK Clean Coal Technologies	6
7	217	Technology Status Report on Co-Utilisation of Coal and Biomass/Waste	15
7	219	Monitoring Aid Agencies Activities in Renewable Energy and Clean Coal Technology	17
7	220	UK input to ETDE International Database	2

Inward Investment

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of inward investment in each year since 1985 was due to the acquisition, takeover or merger of a United Kingdom company by an overseas investor. [9078]

Mr. Greg Knight: The information is as follows. Source: United Kingdom Balance of payments, "the Pink Book" 1990, 1994, 1996.

Year	*Per cent. acquisitions in inward investment*
1985	15.0
1986	23.2

Year	Per cent. acquisitions in inward investment
1987	31.7
1988	26.2
1989	31.7
1990	53.8
1991	52.8
1992	68.3
1993	51.6
1994	43.4
1995	60.1

Although the percentage fluctuates from year to year, reflecting the economic cycle, the flow of total inward investment in 1995 is four and a half times that of 1985; the latest OECD figures show that in 1994 the UK had one third of all inward investment in the EU.

Crown Post Office, Dennistoun

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for how long the Crown post office in Annfield place, Dennistoun, has operated. [8072]

Mr. Page: I understand from the Post Office that a post office has operated in Annfield place since 1 April 1936.

Mr. Martin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the turnover for *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96 at the Crown post office in Annfield place, Dennistoun. [8070]

Mr. Page: Turnover figures for individual post offices are commercially confidential.

Mr. Martin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many customers used the Crown post office in Annfield place, Dennistoun in *(a)* 1993–94, *(b)* 1994–95 and *(c)* 1995–96. [8071]

Mr. Page: I understand from the Post Office that the weekly average number of customers at Duke Street post office has been

1994: 7,920

1995: 7,423

1996: 7,018.

Mr. Martin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Crown post office at Annfield place, Dennistoun, is wholly owned by Post Office Counters Ltd. [8103]

Mr. Page: I understand from the post office that Duke Street post office at Annfield place is wholly owned and operated by Post Office Counters Ltd.

Dounreay

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received in the last year concerning environmental risks posed by the management and disposal of radioactive waste at Dounreay. [8676]

Mr. Page: In the last year my Department has received about 150 letters expressing concern about environmental issues at Dounreay.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what safety and environmental audits of radioactive waste management at the Dounreay nuclear plant have been carried out. [8675]

Mr. Page: The safety and environmental impact of radioactive waste management at Dounreay is subject to continuous review by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority. With respect to audits conducted by the independent regulators, the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate and Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, I refer to the answer I gave the hon. Member on 13 November, *Official Report*, column *229–30*.

Oil Pollution

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many oil exploration and drilling installations and platforms operating under licence in each offshore block have deposited oil spill contingency plans with his Department; and if he will place a sample contingency plan in the Library. [8363]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* My Department currently has 77 oil spill contingency plans from operators of offshore installations. Although this number may seem small when compared to the number of offshore installations operating on the United Kingdom continental shelf, some plans cover more than one installation. It is a requirement of the development approval that an acceptable oil spill contingency plan is in place before an installation can produce oil.

As each plan relates to the specific circumstances it is to address it is difficult to identify a representative "sample" plan. However, I will place in the Library of the House, a copy of the oil spill contingency plan from BP Operating Company Limited on the Foinaven field development with its consent.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the impact on the marine environment of oil spills and discharges from offshore oil platforms since the publication of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution's eighth report on oil pollution of the sea, Cmnd. 8358. [8360]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* My Department has a research and development budget which it uses, in conjunction with other Government Department's and the oil and gas industry, for environmental projects. The most recently completed project was a study into the effects of drill cuttings piles, a copy of which I will place in the Library of the House.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many reports of oil discharges from licensed offshore platforms were made in each year since 1979 to Her Majesty's Government, by the appointed offshore installations manager. [8356]

Mr. Page: Figures relating to the number of oil discharges from offshore installations reported to my

Department from a variety of sources, are published annually in the "Energy Report", copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

My Department maintains a record of the reports from installations which reported an oil spill, but this report need not be made by the appointed offshore installation manager. The records do not always record the status of the reporter.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many prosecutions for the discharge of environmentally hazardous toxic substances under health and safety at work legislation have been brought against operators of offshore installations on the United Kingdom continental shelf since 1990. [8361]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* My Department is not responsible for the prosecution of offences under health and safety at work legislation.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many vessels are currently on standby to respond to oil spill incidents from our near offshore oil platforms in *(a)* the North sea, *(b)* the north Atlantic and *(c)* Cardigan bay; and what was the cost of maintaining these vessels in each of the last three years. [8362]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* There are currently six dedicated oil recovery vessels which are employed to respond to oil spill incidents from or near offshore oil platforms on the UKCS. Four vessels are dedicated on field in sensitive areas—Cardigan bay and the Moray firth—and two are roving vessels which routinely patrol the UKCS. In addition, many of the installation standby vessels are equipped to respond to small spills.

Costs are attributable to industry and are therefore not readily available.

Nuclear Plants

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has received from British Energy relating to plans to construct new nuclear plants in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales after 2006. [8673]

Mr. Page: None. Any applications that come forward for new stations over 50 MW would require consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 and, as with other forms of generation, the applications for consent would be considered on their individual merits.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what his policy towards the future of the nuclear industry and the construction of new nuclear power stations in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England and *(c)* Wales.[8462]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 11 December 1996]:* Nuclear power has to compete with other forms of generation in the electricity market to meet the needs of its customers at commercial prices. Any proposals by British Energy for new nuclear power stations will therefore be a matter for the company and its shareholders. Such proposals, if over 50 MW in capacity, will also require consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act and, as with other forms of generation, the applications for consent will be considered on their individual merits. Applications in Scotland would be considered by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Radiological Testing

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to establish an inquiry into the scope and consequences of Her Majesty's Government's programme of radiological testing conducted by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority since 1957. [6791]

Mr. Page: None. I am satisfied that the level of radiation received by the volunteers involved in the programme of radiological research conducted by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority was negligible in relation to the average exposure to natural background radiation.

HEALTH

Consultants

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much the NHS has spent on the services of Andersen Consulting in the last five years; and on what main tasks the consultants were employed; [6548]

(2) how much the NHS has spent on the services of KPMG in the last five years; and on what main tasks the consultants were employed. [6547]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not collected centrally.

NHS Executives

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the chairs of regional national health service executives whom he has appointed; and in each case *(a)* the past national health service appointments which they held, *(b)* the interests which they declared, *(c)* whether other candidates were considered before their appointment, *(d)* what independent panel reviewed their nominations, *(e)* what nomination he made to such panels and *(f)* what is their current term of office. [8513]

Mr Malone: Information about the previous appointments and declarations of interest of the regional chairmen has been placed in the Library. The following regional chairmen were previously chairmen of regional health authorities and were re-appointed as regional chairmen for two years from 1 April 1996 to March 1998:

Northern and Yorkshire Region: Mr. John Greetham CBE

Trent Region: Mr. Keith Ackroyd CBE

West Midlands Region: Mr. Bryan Baker

Anglia and Oxford Region: Sir Stuart Burgess CBE

South Thames Region: Mr. William Wells.

The remaining regional chairmen were not previously chairmen of regional health authorities and were appointed following an appointment process that included:

a trawl for candidates from serving chairmen and non-executive directors and from other bodies including the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts, the Institute of Health Services Management, The Trust Federation and the Confederation of British Industry;

Interview of shortlisted candidates by a panel comprising Mr. Alan Langlands, chief executive of the NHS executive, Sir Graham Hart, permanent secretary, Department of Health and Mr. Hector McLean as the independent member; and

recommendations by the panel to the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State did not nominate any candidates. The successful candidates, who were all appointed to 31 March 1998, were:

South and West: Miss Janet Trotter (appointed from 1 April 1996)

North West: Professor Alasdair Breckenridge (appointed from 1 April 1996)

North Thames: Mr. Ian Mills (appointed from 8 July 1996).

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health authorities or their successor bodies met the target listed on page 27 of the ministerial group for energy efficiency annual report 1990–91 in respect of the reduction of their fuel bills; and if he will make a statement. [8697]

Mr. Horam: Figures are not available centrally from which to determine whether any individual health body met the target recommended in the ministerial group for energy efficiency's annual report 1990–91. Returns at the end of the five-year period for the national health service overall indicate that energy consumption has reduced by 11.3 per cent., despite a 17.6 per cent. increase in activity between 1990–91 and 1994–95.

Bypass Grafting (Guidelines)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if guidelines for angiography, angioplasty and coronary artery bypass grafting are to be published in Britain along the same lines as those to be published in Northern Ireland. [8909]

Mr. Horam: The clinical resources efficiency support team, an independent group established under the auspices of the Department of Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland, is working on draft guidelines on angiography, angioplasty and coronary artery bypass grafting which they hope to have ready in early 1997. We have no firm plans as yet to issue similar guidelines in England.

E. coli Bacterium

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations his Department had with health authorities in Sunderland about the outbreak of E. coli bacterium in 1995; what advice was offered; and if he will make a statement. [8949]

Mr. Horam: None. This was a local outbreak managed by the local outbreak control team. Under the Food Safety Act 1990 code of practice No. 16, if it is decided that a complaint or problem is likely to be an isolated incident, action should remain with the local food authority. It is established practice for local authorities to inform the Public Health Laboratory Service of incidents of foodborne illness. The Public Health Laboratory Service was involved in this outbreak and gave advice on the epidemiological investigations.

Mental Health

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients admitted to psychiatric hospitals remained there for *(a)* one week or less, *(b)* under one month, *(c)* under three months, *(d)* under six months, *(e)* under one year and *(f)* under five years for the period 1985 to 1995. [8258]

Mr. Burns: The duration of stay of psychiatric patients in national health service hospitals at the point when they were either discharged or died is shown for available years in the table.

Estimated discharges and deaths from NHS hospitals by length of stay[1]

Numbers

England

Length of stay	*1985*	*1986*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
All durations	201,100	200,300	192,800	202,700	210,800	218,700	219,300	217,300
Under 1 week	119,400	118,300	39,300	39,400	41,600	44,500	46,900	47,700
1 week—under 1 month			80,900	86,500	91,500	96,800	97,400	95,000
1 month to under 3 months	52,100	52,000	46,900	50,200	52,800	53,900	53,200	53,200
3 months to under 6 months	18,700	19,100	11,600	12,400	12,400	12,300	12,600	12,900
6 months to under 1 year			5,200	5,300	5,100	5,000	4,500	4,400
1 year to under 5 years	6,800	6,900	5,400	5,400	4,800	4,100	3,300	3,000
5 years and over	4,000	4,000	3,400	3,600	2,600	2,100	1,300	1,100

[1]Figures may not add due to rounding. Figures for 1985 and 1986 relate to calendar years. Data collection systems changed from April 1987 to a financial year basis: reliable data are not available for 1987–88 and 1988–89. Due to changes in data collection methods and NHS re-organisation information for 1989–90 and subsequent years may not be directly comparable with data for 1986. Similarly, data for 1991–92 and subsequent years may not be directly comparable with data for 1989–90 and 1990–91.

SCOTLAND

Lottery Tickets (Sales to Children)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many retailers have been prosecuted for selling *(a)*lottery tickets and *(b)* scratch cards to children in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [8203]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not separately identifiable in the Scottish Office Home Department's classification of crimes and offences. My noble and learned friend the Lord Advocate is not aware of any such prosecutions having been brought in Scotland.

Sea Lice

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what applications for the use of synthetic pyrethroids for the control of sea lice are currently being considered by his Department. [8179]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: None.

Mr. Brendon Callaghan

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to review the case of Mr. Brendon Callaghan; and if he will make a statement. [8678]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Representations received by the Scottish Office to date which claim that there has been a miscarriage of justice in Mr. Callaghan's case are currently being considered. I cannot, however, give an indication of when the review will be completed as documents are still being lodged on Mr. Callaghan's behalf.

"National Standards on Throughcare"

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will now publish "National Standards on Throughcare" which was issued in draft form on 7 February 1996. [8899]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The revised "National Standards on Throughcare" will be issued in early January.

Enterprise Companies

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the prior options study of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, which he announced on 7 February, will be completed; and if he will make a statement. [9465]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The prior options study, undertaken as the first stage of the five-yearly policy and financial management review of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, has now been completed.

I have accepted the overall conclusions of the study. Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise will continue as the two national agencies responsible for safeguarding employment, enhancing skills, promoting Scotland's industrial efficiency and competitiveness, and furthering improvement of the environment. A particular strength of the current arrangements is the ability to take an integrated approach, combining economic development, training and environmental powers in pursuit of economic growth.

The review looked at the scope to privatise, contract out or transfer some or all of the functions of the two bodies. A key feature of the present arrangements is that Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise contract out the delivery of more than 80 per cent. of their programmes to the network of local enterprise companies. These are private companies led by local business people.

The review found that these arrangements have been successful in giving employers ownership of the system of training and enterprise creation, by decentralising decisions and resources to local level through a system of strong, employer-led bodies, leading to better and more focused decision taking. These arrangements will continue, and the review recommends that SE and HIE should continue to look for further opportunities to contract out more of their activities.

The review looked at the scope for rationalisation of the two bodies, but concluded that there would be nothing to be gained by a merger of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. I expect that the two bodies will continue to co-operate fully, as at present, to reduce unnecessary overlap and avoid duplication of effort.

I am grateful to all those organisations and individuals who responded to the invitation to comment which I issued at the start of this review. The second stage of the review, which will examine systems of financial management and control within the two bodies, will now get under way. Many of the comments submitted in the course of the prior options study will be relevant to the second stage.

Copies of the report of the prior options study will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and may be obtained from the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, Room 3-F53, Victoria quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ.

Water and Sewerage Authority Finance

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the external financing limits which will apply to the Scottish water and sewerage authorities in 1997–98, and the following two years. [9466]

Mr. Kynoch: Indicative external financing limits for the three water authorities, after reductions to take account of commutation of debt, were set last year at £163 million for 1997–98 and £157 million for 1998–99. In the light of the recently completed expenditure round the EFL for 1997–98 will remain at £163 million, the indicative EFL for 1998–99 will increase to £187 million and that for 1999–00 will be £223 million.

The allocation of EFLs to each authority in 1997–88 will be: East authority £52 million, North authority £49 million, and West authority £62 million. Indicative allocations for the later years will be given to the authorities later.

Student Grants

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of changes in the student support and tuition fee arrangement for Scottish domiciled students in session 1997–98. [9467]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I am publishing today the main rates of maintenance allowance payable under the students' allowance scheme and the postgraduate students' allowance scheme, including the rates for those course which do not attract student loans, together with the rates for the various supplementary allowances payable to both undergraduate and vocational postgraduate award holders.

The support available to undergraduate students in 1997–98 through the main rates of maintenance grant and loan, taken together, will be 2.5 per cent. higher than in 1996–97, thus maintaining its value in real terms. Postgraduate maintenance grants and supplementary allowances will be increased by a similar amount.

Tuition fees will continue to be reimbursed to institutions through the student support system on behalf of eligible students. The undergraduate rates will be the same as in 1996–97.

These changes are consistent with those for England and Wales announced by my right. hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. Details have been placed in the Library.

Hunterston B and Torness Power Stations

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from British Energy concerning the extension of the operating life of the Hunterston B and Torness nuclear power stations; and if he will make a statement. [8460]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 11 December 1996]:* None. The continued operation of any United Kingdom civil nuclear installations is a matter for the operator subject to the stringent safety requirements of the nuclear industry's independent regulator, the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Hong Kong and Singapore

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list the projects currently receiving overseas aid assistance in *(a)* Hong Kong and *(b)* Singapore; [8718]

(2) how much *(a)* bilateral and *(b)* multilateral aid has been allocated to *(a)* Hong and Kong and *(b)* Singapore in each of the last three years. [8717]

Dr. Liam Fox: British bilateral aid to Hong Kong and Singapore, as reported in "British Aid Statistics", consists of colonial pension payments, scholarships under the Commonwealth scholarship and fellow plan and, in the case of Hong Kong up to 1994–95, assistance via the British Red Cross and Save the Children Fund for Vietnamese boat people.

Such aid in the last three years totalled:

£000

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Hong Kong	423	372	130
Singapore	233	225	238

Total multilateral aid, from the European Community and United Nations, in the last three years for which figures are available was as follows:

£000

	1992	*1993*	*1994*
Hong Kong	13,300	12,100	11,100
Singapore	700	900	1,200

Of this, the estimated share attributable to the United Kingdom was:

£000

	1992	*1993*	*1994*
Hong Kong	1,300	300	600
Singapore	—	100	100

HOME DEPARTMENT

New Constituencies (Boundary Maps)

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons no official maps of the boundaries of the new West Worthing and East Worthing and Shoreham constituencies are available; and when he estimates his Department will produce them. [8908]

Mr. Sackville: The composition of the new constituencies is set out in the Parliamentary Constituencies (England) Order 1995 and the new boundaries will come into effect at the next general election.

The fourth periodical report of the Boundary Commission for England, published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office—now The Stationery Office—on 6 June 1995, illustrates the commission's recommended boundaries for all constituencies in England. Those recommendations were given effect, without modification, by the Parliamentary Constituencies (England) Order 1995. Maps of the constituencies of West Worthing and East Worthing and Shoreham are found at volume 4 of the commission's report, which is available from the Stationery Office and its accredited agents.

We have no plans for the Department to produce further maps of the new constituencies.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the procedures for interviewing, at

Home Office immigration offices, applicants for asylum who are *(a)* accompanied by a solicitor or adviser and *(b)* unaccompanied; and if he will make a statement. [8839]

Mr. Kirkhope: The procedures followed for asylum interviews are the same whether or not the applicant is accompanied by a representative.

At the initial screening interview, all applicants are asked standard questions to establish their identity and method of entry to the United Kingdom. During the substantive asylum interview, the purpose of the interview is explained to the applicant, who will then be asked to confirm personal details and to give the interviewing officer as much information as possible about the basis of their claim for asylum. At the end of the interview, the applicant and interviewer will sign the interview notes as an accurate record of the interview and the applicant will be given a copy of the interview notes.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what written information his Department provides to people seeking refugee status concerning the documentation that they need to provide; and if he will make a statement. [8847]

Mr. Kirkhope: Asylum seekers who apply by post are sent a letter inviting them to attend a screening interview and advising them of the documentation they will be required to produce at that interview. Those asylum seekers who apply in person and who do not have the necessary documentation with them are given a copy of the standard invitation letter containing details of the documentation they will have to produce on a subsequent occasion. A new information leaflet on asylum procedures will be introduced shortly.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training is given to staff working at Home Office immigration offices who deal with people seeking refugee status. [8837]

Miss Widdecombe: All new asylum caseworkers attend a two-week induction course which provides specialist training in asylum issues and procedures. After three months in post, staff receive training in the skills necessary to enable them to carry out interviews of asylum applicants. Refresher training, and training in new developments such as legislation, is provided from time to time as necessary.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what checks are made by staff at Home Office immigration offices of the documentation handed in by applicants for asylum to enable mistakes to be rectified. [8836]

Mr. Kirkhope: It is the responsibility of the applicant to supply the correct documentation. Home Office staff are not normally in a position to identify mistakes within documents, other than checking that the document refers to the applicant and not to some other person. If a self-completion questionnaire contains obvious mistakes or discrepancies, these may be pursued with the applicant during the asylum interview.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have had their applications considered under the short procedure from 30 June to date; and how many of these applications were *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused, indicating which countries they were from. [7784]

Mr. Kirkhope: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column 507, how many asylum seekers have been detained at the point of entry since 1 January; and how many were subsequently held for longer than one month. [7801]

Mr. Kirkhope: It is estimated that 1,530 persons who had sought asylum on arrival in the United kingdom between 1 January 1996 and 5 November 1996 were placed into detention for one night, or longer, during that period.

Further analysis of the information given in the reply of 6 November has led to a downwards revision of the figure of 642 port asylum seekers placed in detention between 1 July and 30 September 1996. It is now estimated that 520 such persons were placed into detention for one night or longer during this period.

The breakdown of those detained during a specific time period, by length of detention, is not available.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff at Lunar house speak foreign languages; and if he will list members of staff who are able to communicate with applicants in languages other than English. [8838]

Mr. Kirkhope: The information requested is not readily available in the form requested and could be collected only at disproportionate cost. However, 42 staff in Lunar house are registered as qualified in at least one foreign language which they may be called upon to use in the course of their official duties. These staff receive a foreign language allowance.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the procedures when an application is made to a Home Office immigration office seeking asylum, with particular reference to the procedures followed once documents have been handed in; and how the applicant is informed of the procedures. [8846]

Mr. Kirkhope: Asylum applicants who submit their applications to the Home Office are required to attend a screening interview in order to establish their identity and method of entry to the United Kingdom. Their fingerprints will also be taken in accordance with the provisions of the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993. Once identity has been satisfactorily established, the applicant will be issued with a standard acknowledgement letter confirming their identity as an asylum seeker. If it is not possible to conduct a substantive interview with the applicant about his claim at that time, he will be asked to

complete a questionnaire. When the questionnaire has been returned, it will be considered by the caseworker together with any other documentation submitted in support of the claim.

Applicants are informed of the procedures by letter at each stage of their application. A new information leaflet on asylum procedures will be introduced shortly.

Television Licences

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those committed to prison for television licence fine default in the first seven months of 1996 were women; and how many of these were mothers of children under 16 years of age. [7776]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Audrey Wise, dated 13 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, how many of those committed to prison for television licence fine default in the first seven months of 1996 were women; and how many of these were mothers of children under 16 years of age.

Provisional information shows that for the period January to July 1996, 65 women were received into prison for defaulting on a fine after conviction for using a television without a licence. No information is available centrally on the number who were mothers of children aged under 16 years.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were committed to prison for television licence fine default during 1995; what was the average time served in prison; and what was the cost to the Prison Service. [7780]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Ms Audrey Wise, dated 13 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, how many people were committed to prison for television licence fine default during 1995; what was the average time served in prison; and what was the cost to the Prison Service.

For 1995, 728 persons (493 males and 235 females) were received into prison for defaulting on a fine after conviction for using a television without a licence. The average time served by fine defaulters is one week. Information on the number of fine defaulters received into Prison Service establishments in England and Wales, by offence group, is published in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales" (table 7.2 of the 1995 edition, Cm 3355), a copy of which is available in the Library.

Information on the cost of prisoners according to their type of offence is not collected centrally. The average weekly net operating cost of a prison place in 1995–96 was £465.

Prisons

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison places were available at 1 November; and if he will make a statement. [7906]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Elfyn Llwyd, dated 13 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General, to reply to your recent Question about the number of prison places available at 1 November.

On 31 October 1996, the closest date to the 1 November for which figures are available, the total In-Use Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA) was 53,500, and the total Baseline CNA was 56,835. The Operational Capacity at 31 October 1996 was 58,977, and the Population was 57,587.

In-Use CNA represents the total number of uncrowded places estimated to be available in the estate. Baseline CNA is the total number of uncrowded places, including those which are out of use due to refurbishment. Operational Capacity is the number of prisoners the estate can hold without serious risk to good order, security and the proper running of regimes, and which allows for overcrowding.

Police Custody (Deaths)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training measures have been introduced by the police in England and Wales to prevent deaths in police custody. [8683]

Mr. Maclean: The custody officer training package, which is available to forces in England and Wales, covers all statutory duties and procedures contained within the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, and its associated codes of practice, for dealing with people taken into custody. They stipulate that a police surgeon must be called to any person who appears to be suffering from physical illness or mental disorder; is injured; fails to respond normally to questions; or otherwise appears to be in need of medical attention. In urgent cases, the person must be sent to hospital or the nearest available medical practitioner called.

Persons in detention have to be visited every hour, and those who are drunk at least every half hour. The custody officer may remove any articles of clothing or personal effects if he considers the suspect may use them to cause harm to himself or others.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been *(a)* disciplined, *(b)* suspended and *(c)* charged with offences relating to the death of a black person in custody since 1990. [8682]

Mr. Maclean: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many coroners' inquests into

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Embassies and Consulates (Opening Hours)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are currently the average hours of opening of embassies and consulates in *(a)* Europe and *(b)* other countries. [9034]

Dr. Liam Fox: The opening hours for British embassies and consulates in Europe and in other countries are based on local practice.

Normally this would mean at least seven hours on a full working day. Consular offices are normally open to the public for at least five hours on full working days but shorter hours may be implemented where the overall consular workload makes this appropriate.

Consular staff are on call world wide 24 hours a day to help British nationals in distress.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what hours the British consulate in Berlin is *(a)* open and *(b)* open to receive calls from British businesses. [9035]

Dr. Fox: The opening hours of the British embassy office in Berlin are 8.30 to 17.00 local with a lunch break between 12.30 and 13.30. The embassy office switchboard is manned continually during open hours.

The consular section of the British embassy office in Berlin is open to the public from 9.00 to 12.00 and 14.00 to 16.00. Consular staff are on call 24 hours a day to help British nationals in distress.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs during which hours of the day United Kingdom overseas embassies and consulates are open for telephone inquiries from United Kingdom businesses. [8950]

Dr. Fox: British embassies and consulates are usually open for telephone inquiries seven hours a day. Details for individual posts can be obtained from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 0171 270 1500.

Consular staff are on call world wide 24 hours a day to help British nationals in distress.

Germany (Departmental Costs)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the annual cost of his Department's presence in Germany in each of the last three years. [9033]

Mr. Hanley: The annual cash operating cost of the missions in Germany was as follows:

Financial year	£
1993–94	19,480,357
1994–95	20,637,195
1995–96	21,722,071

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the annual cost to his Department of the running of the consulate in Berlin. [8951]

Mr. Hanley: The cash operating cost of the British embassy office in Berlin for 1995–96 was £3,780,937.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the present staff establishment of the British consulate in Berlin. [8952]

Mr. Hanley: UK-based staff figures are staff numbers from the authorised establishment but locally engaged staff are calculated in man years.

There are currently 21 UK-based staff working at the British embassy office in Berlin. These are supported by 41.20 man years of locally engaged staff—this figure includes locally engaged staff at the ambassador's residence.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the cost to his Department of all United Kingdom consulates in Germany. [8953]

Mr. Hanley: The cash operating cost of our missions in Germany for 1995–96 was as follows:

	£
British Embassy, Bonn	8,744,134
Embassy Office, Berlin	3,780,937
Consulate-General, Dusseldorf	4,073,785
Consulate-General, Frankfurt	1,656,779
Consulate-General, Hamburg	1,390,261
British Trade Office, Leipzig	38,327
Consulate-General, Munich	1,586,127
Consulate-General, Stuttgart	451,721
Total	21,722,071

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Museum Inventories

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps are being taken to check the stock in the collections held by *(a)* the British museum, *(b)* the Victoria and Albert museum and *(c)* the national museums in Scotland and Wales against their inventories; and when these checks were last made. [8200]

Mr. Sproat: The national museums and galleries are accountable for the security of their collections. Under the financial memoranda, the British museum has to keep detailed inventory and stock records. It carries out regular stock-takes of the items in its collections and, as part of this, it is common practice for museum staff to make daily checks of exhibits. Similar arrangements apply to the national museums and galleries of Scotland and the national museums and galleries of Wales.

Crystal Palace National Sports Centre

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the future of Crystal Palace national sports centre. [8332]

Mr. Sproat: The future of the facilities at Crystal Palace national sports centre are, in the first instance, a matter for Bromley borough council and the Sports Council. In taking forward the initiatives in "Sport:

Raising the Game", it will be necessary, however, to consider the future of the national sports centres currently operated by the Sports Council to see how the objectives of the sports policy statement can best be achieved within the resources and opportunities available.

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how much her Department plans to spend on celebrating Christmas and the new year. [7573]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* My Department estimates that it will spend approximately £1,850 on celebrating Christmas and the new year. This includes the cost of Christmas cards, the provision of a Christmas tree and a contribution for official guests at the Department's party.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8541]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* Guidance issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments requires that candidates for public appointment are selected from a wide field identified through advertising, executive search, consultation with interested bodies and through the public appointments unit as appropriate.

Over the past year the Department of National Heritage has used all these methods and in addition has set up a central appointments unit to maintain a departmental register of those interested in public office.

The Department of National Heritage does not retain records to enable us to identify which of the appointments made over the past year were candidates first identified by the PAU. However, of the 144 people appointed to this Department's sponsored bodies over the past year, 22 were registered with the PAU.

Football Trust Grants

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the safeguards that will be put in place to ensure that local association football clubs will continue to receive grants from the Football Trust; and what alternative funds will be provided from the national lottery. [8312]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 11 December 1996]:* The Football trust receives revenue from the spot the ball competition, the home nation football associations and the FA Premier league to help football clubs at all levels. The distribution of grants from these sources is a matter for the Football trust. This money is entirely separate from the pool betting duty concession afforded to the trust to find safety-related works in line with Lord Justice Taylor's report into the Hillsborough disaster for clubs in the FA Premier league, the Football league and the Scottish Football league.

The national lottery has become a major new source of assistance to football at the grass roots and community level—240 football-related projects have received funding of £22 million, making football one of the main beneficiaries of the lottery.

BBC Licence Fee

Mr. Renton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she expects to make an announcement regarding the increase in the BBC licence fee. [8318]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 11 December 1996]:* My right hon. Friend hopes to announce later this month what the television licence fees will be from 1 April next year.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to her answer of 21 November, *Official Report,* column *647,* what is the current total of future spending commitments arising under the private finance initiative as a percentage of the Department's discretionary expenditure. [8739]

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 12 December 1996]:* The Department of National Heritage has no future spending commitments arising from the private finance initiative. Indeed, deals signed to date have generated an annual net positive revenue stream of £0.645 million. The Department's discretionary expenditure is £850 million, so this represents an annual income of 0.08 per cent.

TREASURY

Taxation and Expenditure

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the change in general taxation necessary to fund current levels of public spending, with current borrowing, if the United Kingdom economy had grown since 1979 at the rate established between the end of 1973 and the second quarter of 1979. [7388]

Mr. Waldegrave: The United Kingdom's real gross domestic product grew at an average annual rate of 1.64 per cent. between the third quarter of 1973 and the second quarter of 1979. Since the third quarter of 1979 the annual rate of real GDP growth has averaged 1.9 per cent.

If real GDP had grown since the third quarter of 1979 at an annual rate of 1.64 per cent., other things being equal, the combined impact on tax receipts and spending would raise borrowing by approximately 3½ per cent. of GDP. Therefore, to keep borrowing unchanged, taxation would have to rise by up to 3½ per cent. of GDP. However, there is great uncertainty over estimates of this kind.

Income Tax

Sir Terence Higgins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those countries which do not have an income tax. [8027]

terms for an extension, the contract with Group 4 Prison Services Ltd was extended on 31 October for a further 5 years from 6 April 1997.

The price agreed is equivalent to a 7.3% reduction in the current annual cost to the Prison Service and the contract also incorporates a number of new features.

As recommended by the Public Accounts Committee, a Performance Measurement System has been included in the contract. The system encourages an improvement in service levels throughout the next five years by providing more rigorous targets each year.

Group 4 will incur fixed penalties if prisoners escape whilst in their custody.

All risks relating to damage to buildings and plant at the prison (including malicious damage) will now be covered by commercial insurance taken out by Group 4 at their expense.

Some of the existing contractual conditions have been clarified and re-drafted in light of past experience, including improvements in standard conditions achieved during negotiations for DCMF (Design, Construct, Manage and Finance) prison contracts. For example, the default procedure has been improved by greater clarity over the period available for the rectification of unsatisfactory performance.

New and more flexible arrangements have been introduced to cope with population increases.

Targets for regime activities have been updated including 30 hours work per convicted prisoner per week (compared with the national Prison Service target this year of 26.5 hours), whilst the daily time out of cell has been reduced from a target of 14 hours per day to 12 hours (compared with the national Prison Service target this year of "at least 60% of prisoners to be held in establishments which unlock prisoners for at least 10 hours per weekday").

Additional costs are transferred to Group 4 and will no longer be funded from other Prison Service Budgets. These include the provision of probation services and the funding of prisoners remuneration and discharge grants.

A copy of the Contract has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Crime (Guns)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many criminals who took a gun to a crime have been given a life sentence since 1989; what is the average tariff set in such cases to date; how many have been released to date; and what is the average sentence served by those who have been released to date; [7517]

(2) how many criminals who took a gun to a crime have been given custodial sentences other than a life sentence since 1989; what is the average length of sentence given; how many have been released to date; and what is the average sentence served by those who have been released to date; [7518]

(3) how many criminals who took a gun to a crime were given a sentence other than a custodial sentence since 1989; and how many were given each of the non-custodial sentences which have been used for such offenders. [7519]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 5 December 1996]:* Information readily available centrally is given in the following tables. It relates to the type of sentence passed on the principal offence, where at least one of the offences dealt with at the final court appearance was for a firearms offence. It will thus exclude those instances where a firearm was involved and either no separate proceedings were undertaken or they were terminated early.

It is an offence under the Firearms Acts, subject to a maximum sentence of life imprisonment, to be in possession of a firearm with intent to commit an indictable offence. In the six years from 1990 to 1995, 717 people were convicted of this offence in England and Wales; 420 of them were imprisoned, with an average length of sentence of 36 months. None were sentenced to life imprisonment.

The time served by prisoners who have been sentenced since October 1992 is determined by the sentencing structure specified by the Criminal Justice Act 1991. For those sentenced before October 1992, there were different arrangements for remission, release and parole.

Table A: Immediate custodial sentences and average sentence lengths for indictable offences where there is an associated firearms offence[1] by type of court, 1989 to 1995

	Magistrates courts		Crown court			
Year	Number	Average sentence length (months)	Life[2]	Other	Total	Average sentence length (months)[3]
1989	61	3.1	5	1,082	1,087	46.7
1990	36	3.7	4	1,090	1,094	47.0
1991	50	3.3	4	1,207	1,211	43.8
1992	48	3.3	5	1,320	1,325	47.3
1993	71	3.4	6	1,232	1,238	46.9
1994	93	3.9	3	1,338	1,341	45.8
1995	121	3.2	10	1,411	1,421	40.3

[1] The information tabulated is for the principal offence, where at least one of the offences dealt with at the final court appearance was for a firearms offence.

[2] Comparisons with other sources suggest that the figures for life sentences are particularly subject to under recording. For example, 123 persons were given a life sentence for homicide offences initially recorded in the years 1989 to 1995, where the method of killing was shooting.

[3] Excludes lifers.

Table B: Person sentenced for indictable offences, where there is an associated firearms offence[1], by type of sentence or order, 1989 to 1995

England and Wales

Type of sentence or order	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Absolute discharge	60	48	69	67	48	43	50
Conditional discharge	282	298	342	372	385	449	505
Fine	918	985	901	792	618	762	862
Probation order	151	182	187	186	180	210	245
Supervision order	47	52	41	39	35	66	72
Community service order	122	154	161	152	201	260	293
Attendance centre order	55	44	46	32	26	42	48
Combination order	n/a	n/a	n/a	9	41	65	104
Fully suspended sentence	211	240	241	210	49	58	81
Immediate custody	1,148	1,130	1,261	1,373	1,309	1,434	1,542
s.53, Children and Young Persons Act 1933	5	5	7	13	25	41	28
Otherwise dealt with	27	27	38	40	28	39	47
Total sentenced	3,026	3,165	3,294	3,285	2,945	3,469	3,877

[1] The information tabulated is for the principal offence, where at least one of the offences dealt with at the final court appearance was for a firearms offence.
n/a=Not applicable.

Roisin McAliskey

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) in how many prisons in England and Northern Ireland Roisin McAliskey has been held on remand; and for how long in each prison; [8583]

(2) how many *(a)* doctors and *(b)* consultants have examined Roisin McAliskey and in which (i) prisons and (ii) hospitals the examinations took place; [8563]

(3) what medical facilities were available for pregnant women at each of the prisons where Roisin McAliskey was held. [8584]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 13 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about Ms Roisin McAliskey.

Ms McAliskey has been held in two prisons while on remand. She was committed initially to Holloway prison on 27 November and then transferred to Belmarsh prison on 30 November before being returned to Holloway prison.

Ms McAliskey has been seen 11 times by doctors while in Holloway and Belmarsh. On 4 December Ms McAliskey complained of stomach pains. An appointment was made for her to see a consultant obstetrician at Greenwich District hospital. She had a scan and a full examination. The obstetrician confirmed that Ms McAliskey was in good general health, that her 16 week pregnancy was progressing normally and that there was no cause for concern. As a further precaution Ms McAliskey was returned to Holloway Prison where specialist ante-natal care is more readily available, should it become necessary. Since her return to Holloway she was been visited twice by the prison gynaecologist.

Holloway prison has a dedicated wing with specialist expertise and interest in caring for pregnant women. Admission is on a voluntary basis. Belmarsh prison has full inmate care facilities, but no facilities specifically for pregnant women. All prisons have the back up of the National Health Service, for both in-patient and out patient facilities. In addition, consultants are contracted by the Prison Service to carry out clinics in the prisons themselves.

Belmarsh Prison Visit

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what facilities were offered to Eamon O'Cuiv TD during his visit to Her Majesty's prison, Belmarsh on 5 December; and if he will make a statement. [8558]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 13 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the facilities offered to Mr O''Cuiv TD for his visit to Belmarsh Prison.

Mr. O'Cuiv visited Belmarsh on 5 December where he met a group of prisoners in the Special Secure Unit, in open conditions. The visit was conducted in sight but out of hearing of prison officers.

Mr. O'Cuiv was unable to see all the prisoners he wished to see because of his afternoon commitments In addition, one prisoner was required to attend an outside hospital appointment at short notice.

Football (Police)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the payments made to the Metropolitan police by each of London's Premier and Football League clubs in seasons 1995–96 and 1996–97 to date. [8787]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 12 December 1996]:* I understand from the Commission of Police of the Metropolis that the payments made are as follows:

Club	*1995–96 season* £	*1996–97 season (to 30 November 1996)* £
Arsenal	269,518.59	61,545.93
Barnet	27,262.37	12,713.89
Brentford	38,906.80	19,307.69
Charlton	40,682.31	4,583.68
Chelsea	235,945.03	22,188.58
Crystal Palace	193,525.93	13,256.97
Fulham	24,444.03	5,017.30
Leyton Orient	35,204.81	5,892.80
Millwall	128,557.85	24,976.67
Queens Park Rangers	93,140.28	8,530.03
Tottenham Hotspur	193,372.55	21,245.80
West Ham United	168,311.36	[1]0.00
Wimbledon	156,028.89	48,743.41
Total	1,604,900.80	248,002.75

[1] £35,062.61 received on 7 December 1996 (payment delayed while invoices discussed).

During the 1995–96 football season, the Metropolitan police received £49,000 from Leyton Orient and £86,000 from Millwall in respect of outstanding invoices for previous seasons. To date this season, the Metropolitan police have received £9,000 from Leyton Orient and £8,000 from Millwall in respect of outstanding invoices for previous seasons prior to 1995–96.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 16 December 1996

ENVIRONMENT

Battersea Power Station

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when Battersea power station was closed as an electricity generating station. [8715]

Sir Paul Beresford: I understand that operations ceased in 1982.

Transport Schemes

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations his Department has had concerning the regulations making utilities liable for 18 per cent. of the costs of diversionary works for major transport schemes. [9295]

Mr. Clappison: Discussions have taken place at official and ministerial level with the Department of Transport which has the main responsibility for the legislation in question and these are still continuing Consultations have also taken place with the national joint utilities group.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution he estimates the private finance initiative will make to the capital programme of local authorities. [7789]

Mr. Curry: We have announced support for up to £50 million of PFI investment in 1996–97, and £200 million in 1997–98. The public private partnerships programme has recently announced a series of PFI pathfinder projects which are expected to be signed during the next 18 months.

Personal Social Services Funding

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the 1996–97 and 1997–98 standard spending assessment control totals for personal social services—PSS—by sub-block, putting the 1996–97 figures on the same basis as those for 1997–98, adjusted for changes in function and with the community care special transitional grant—STG—added to PSS control totals for 1996–97; what was the percentage change in each total so calculated; and if he will relate the above figures to the totals for funding for personal social services. [9046]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information on standard spending assessments is set out in the table. Funding for local authorities comes from specific and special grants and from the general revenues of the local authority. Specific and special grants for personal social services are proposed to be £453.9 million in 1997–98. Other forms of revenue funding are not hypothecated so it is not possible to determine their contribution to funding personal social services.

Standard spending assessments for personal social services

	Adjusted 1996–97 (£ million)	*Provisional 1997–98 (£ million)*	*Change (Percentage)*
Children's social services	1,754.7	1,754.7	0.0
Elderly residential social services	2,557.5	2,558.3	0.0
Elderly domiciliary social services	1,599.9	1,599.9	0.0
Other social services	1,479.2	1,479.2	0.0

Waste Management (Costs)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the on-cost to business of the implementation of the European initiated waste management strategy; and if he will make a statement. [8961]

Mr. Clappison: The European initiated waste strategy does not have any legal force and as such it has no direct cost implications for business. It is simply a review, largely summarising existing EU policies, which will provide a framework for future work.

Any specific proposals which may arise as a result will of course require a compliance cost assessment to be undertaken before passing into United Kingdom law. We would also expect the Commission to produce a fiche d'impact. In negotiations for any future proposals, the UK will always take into consideration the important balance between the need to improve environmental standards and practices against the costs to industry.

Care (Accommodation)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what discussions he has had regarding accommodation for young people with welfare agencies; [9205]

(2) if he will estimate the number of care leavers who are at present seeking accommodation; [9209]

(3) what proposals he has to assist care leavers to find accommodation; [9207]

(4) if he will list the figures for care leavers in *(a)* Coventry and *(b)* the west midlands seeking accommodation; [9210]

(5) what discussions he has had with charities with special reference to Barnardos and the Children's Society regarding accommodation for care leavers. [9208]

Mr. Clappison: Ministers and officials in the Department have contact with many organisations to discuss and seek views on a range of housing issues, including the housing needs of young people such as care leavers. For example, the views of Barnardos and the Children's Society were obtained to inform the drafting of the code of guidance on parts VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996. On 20 January 1997, section 179 of that Act will come into force, requiring local housing

authorities to ensure that advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness is available to anyone in their area, including care leavers.

On 1 April 1997, provisions in the 1996 Act will come into force requiring local housing authorities to give reasonable preference in the allocation of social housing to people with a particular need for settled accommodation on welfare grounds, which can include care leavers and other young people at risk. These new measures complement social services authorities' duties and powers under the Children Act 1989 to assist care leavers, and housing authorities' duties under the homelessness legislation to ensure that vulnerable young people who become homeless unintentionally have access to suitable accommodation. My Department does not collect data on the numbers of care leavers seeking accommodation.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research has been conducted *(a)* by and *(b)* on behalf of his Department, on the impact of the uniform business rate on small businesses in (i) urban and (ii) rural settings; and if he will publish the findings. [9211]

Sir Paul Beresford: Research into the impact of non-domestic rates costs on different types of business, conducted by IFF Research Ltd. on behalf of my Department, was published in February 1995.

Housing Registers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to publish the new code of practice for housing registers. [9206]

Mr. Clappison: The new code of guidance on the allocation of local authority housing and homelessness, issued under parts VI and VII of the Housing Act 1996, was published on 31 October. Copies have been sent to all local housing authorities in England.

Telecommunications Antennae

Sir Michael Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the results of his Department's consultation on amending the planning controls regarding the installation of telecommunications antennae. [9153]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government expect to make an announcement shortly.

Housing Resources

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to make an announcement about the distribution of housing resources for 1997–98. [9602]

Mr. Curry: I am today announcing decisions about the distribution of resources for housing in 1997–98.

Councils will receive housing investment programme allocations totalling nearly £900 million for 1997—98. Under the competitive HIP process, we have again been able to direct funding to those councils which are best able to make use of them.

Within the HIP programme, £628 million is for general purpose allocations, or housing "annual capital guidelines". For the first time this year, these have been allocated on a fully competitive basis in line with the Government's move towards increased challenge and competitive funding as a means of improving the allocation of capital funding and the value for money obtained.

In addition to these annual capital guidelines, £193 million has been allocated for private sector renewal and £56 million for disabled facilities grant. These have also been allocated on a fully competitive basis.

As part of the assessment of its performance, each local authority is required to submit a housing strategy statement, setting out a comprehensive framework for housing programmes for at least the next three years, covering not only the plans of the local authority, but the contribution to be made by the private housing sector. The strategy is prepared in consultation with all those interested in the local housing scene, including the Housing Corporation, housing associations, tenants' groups and the private sector. Once again, there is a continuing improvement in the performance of the great majority of local authorities.

I am depositing tables in the Library of the House listing each authority's annual capital guideline and allocations for private sector renewal and disabled facilities grants for 1997—98. Together these comprise the HIP allocation. In addition, I am depositing a list of the authorities whose performance is assessed as being well above the average for their region.

Last month, the Government announced a new package of measures aimed at encouraging local authorities to transfer more of their stock to registered social landlords. Within the package of new measures, the estates renewal challenge fund will receive an additional £70 million over the next three years bringing spending to almost £500 million. Authorities will be granted a three year 'holiday' from the large-scale voluntary transfers receipts levy and the rules governing the use of LSVT receipts will come into line with those for right-to-buy transfers, making 25 per cent. of any receipt available to authorities to spend on housing. The limits on the size of a transfer to any one landlord will be increased from 5,000 to 12,000.

We also propose to use the housing investment programme to encourage such stock transfers and we will be consulting on changes to the 1997 HIP round in the new year.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Garel-Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will announce the shortlist of prospective purchasers of the Building Research Establishment. [9555]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Following our consideration of a number of indicative offers for the Building Research Establishment, we have decided to short list two bids, the Built Environment Research Foundation, formed by University College London, and the BRE management bid team. They have been invited to submit final bids by 20 January 1997, following which a preferred bidder will be chosen.

TRANSPORT

London Transport Staff

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people are employed by London Transport in *(a)* managerial and *(b)* administrative posts; and, for each category, what is the annual cost. [9155]

Mr. Bowis: The total number of staff employed by London Transport at October 1996 was 19,424. The total staff cost for London Transport for the year ending 31 March 1997 is forecast to be £548.3 million. My Department does not have a detailed breakdown between managerial and administrative posts. This is an operational matter for London Transport.

Jubilee Line

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the Jubilee line extension to be completed; and what was the target date for completion. [9154]

Mr. Bowis: London Transport assure me that it is me still aiming for the original target opening date of 28 March 1998.

Trans-European Transport

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what will be the United Kingdom's share of funds available in 1996 for priority projects and other schemes under the European Community's financing programme for trans-European transport networks. [9638]

Sir George Young: Priority projects in the United Kingdom will receive some £27.6 million, which is over 16 per cent. of the total funds available for priority projects in 1996 and more than any other member state will receive from the EC fund, apart from Germany. A total of £20 million will go towards the Channel tunnel rail link, with £5.75 million for the west coast main line and £1.85 million for schemes along the Ireland-UK-Benelux road link. The UK will also receive almost £2 million for other schemes, of which £1.34 million is for four traffic management projects and £0.65 million for a development study of the great western line between Bristol and Penzance.

Traffic Projections

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the traffic capacity of the M65; and what is the current traffic volume; [8196]

(2) what is the traffic capacity of the A59 between Clitheroe and Skipton; and what is the current traffic volume; [8195]

(3) what projections his Department has made of trans-Pennine traffic growth on the M62 over the next 20 years. [8194]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 16 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent questions about the M62 and M65 motorways and the A59 trunk road.

M62 Motorway

You asked what projections the Department has made of Trans-Pennine traffic growth on the M62 over the next 20 years. Based on National Traffic Growth Forecasts which were last updated in 1989, the forecast annual traffic growth on the M62 over the next 20 years ranges between 31% and 44% for cars and from 45% to 72% for heavy goods vehicles.

M65 Motorway

You asked about the traffic capacity of the M65 and the current traffic volume. A measure of capacity is the Congestion Reference Flow (CRF), which is derived from a number of factors including carriageway width, vertical and horizontal alignment, and the proportion of HGVs. Regional maps with explanatory notes have been deposited in the House of Commons library (Vol 282, Columns 1100–1101) which describe the relationship between CRFs, congestion and capacity.

The CRF of the M65 ranges from 80,000 on the two lane section between Junctions 9 and 10, to 125,000 vehicles per day on the section between Junctions 7 and 8.

The existing traffic flows on the M65 range from 35,000 to 45,000 vehicles per day.

A59 Between Clitheroe and Skipton

You asked about the traffic capacity of the A59 between Clitheroe and Skipton and the current traffic volume. The Congestion Reference Flow (CRF) of the A59 between Clitheroe and Skipton is within the range 18,000 to 22,000 vehicles per day subject to the varying standard of the route.

Existing traffic flows on the A59 are 10,000 vehicles per day at Clitheroe dropping to 6,000 between Gisburn and the Lancashire/North Yorkshire county boundary, and rising to 14,300 between the A56 and Skipton.

Road Projects

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which road projects *(a)* completed since 1991–92 and *(b)* not yet completed included private sector involvements. [6743]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Andrew Hunter, dated 16 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking which road projects (a) completed since 1991/92 and (b) not yet completed, included private sector involvement.

As part of the Department of Transport's response to the private finance initiative, a number of schemes in the roads programme are being developed as Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) projects. This is an innovative way to introduce private sector finance and expertise into scheme development and management of the network.

Contracts awarded so far, including the major construction projects involved, are as follows:-

Financial Year 1995/96

A69 Carlisle to Newcastle (Haltwhistle Bypass)

A1(M) Alconbury to Peterborough

A419/A417 Swindon to Gloucester (A419/A417 Cirencester & Stratton Bypass, A417 North of Stratton to Nettleton Improvement and A419 Latton Bypass)

M1–A1 Yorkshire Link (Lofthouse to Bramham Improvement)

Financial Year 1996/97

A50 Stoke–Derby Link (A564 Doveridge Bypass)

A30/A35 Exeter to Bere Regis (A35 Honiton to Exeter Improvement and A35 Tolpuddle to Puddletown Bypass)

M40 Junctions 1–15 (Junctions 1A–3 Widening)

A19 Dishforth to Tyne Tunnel (Norton–Parkway Interchange Improvement).

Clearly, it is too early for any of the major projects involved to have been completed yet.

Added to these DBFO projects, the Secretary of State announced after the Budget statement that we are going ahead with seven more DBFO projects involving 33 separate major construction schemes. These are as follows:-

M6 Extension Carlisle–Scottish Border

incorporating:

M6 Carlisle–Guardsmill Extension.

This forms part of M6 DBFO project being taken forward by the Secretary of State for Scotland. The DBFO contract is in the final stages of negotiation and subject to bids being value for money, a contract could be awarded in the early part of next year.

Cumbria to Bradford DBFO Project

incorporating:

A590 High and Low Newton Bypass

A65 Hellifield and Long Preston Bypass

A65 Gargrave Bypass

A629 Skipton to Kildwick Improvement

A650 Bingley Relief Road

A650 Hard Ings Road Improvement.

Weald and Downland DBFO Project

incorporating:

A21 Tonbridge Bypass to Pembury Bypass Dualling

A21 Lamberhurst Bypass

A27 Polegate Bypass

A259 Pevensey to Bexhill Improvement

A259 Bexhill and Hastings Western Bypass

A259 Hastings Eastern Bypass.

South Midlands Network DBFO Project

incorporating:

A6 Great Glen Bypass

A6 Rothwell and Desborough Bypass

A6 Rushden and Higham Ferrers Bypass

A6 Clapham Bypass

A43 Silverstone Bypass

A43 Whitfield Turn to Brackley Hatch Dualling

A43 M40 to B4031 Improvement

A428 Norse Road Link.

Wessex Link DBFO Project

incorporating:

A36 Salisbury Bypass

A303 Wylye to Stockton Wood Improvement

A303 Sparkford to Ilchester Improvement

A303 Ilminster Bypass Improvement

A36 Codford to Heytesbury Improvement

A303 Chicklade Bottom to Mere Improvement.

A13 Thames Gateway DBFO Project

incorporating:

A13 Ironbridge to Canning Town Improvement

A13/A117 Woolwich Manor Way Junction Improvement

A13 Movers Lane Junction Improvement

A13/A112 Prince Regent Lane Junction Improvement.

West London Approach DBFO Project

incorporating:

A40 Gypsy Corner Improvement

A40 Western Circus Improvement.

Development of these new projects is going well and we would expect to award contract for the first three before the end of the next financial year. Contracts for the A13 and West London projects should be awarded Spring/Summer of 1998. The Wessex Link will be taken forward as soon as the post public inquiry assessments for Salisbury Bypass have been concluded.

Outside the DBFO initiative, three major projects involve private finance. These are:

Dartford Thurrock Crossing (completed in October 1991)

Second Severn Crossing (completed earlier this year)

Birmingham Northern Relief Road (still going through statutory processes).

There are also many smaller schemes, including simple junction improvements, which are privately funded either wholly, or in part, under Section 278 of the Highways Act 1980. This provision allows developers or private companies to finance improvements to trunk roads necessitated by development. Over the five year period from 1991/92 to 1995/96, agreements were reached to promote schemes totalling over £37m. Most of these schemes have been constructed, but a few have been delayed because they are linked to developments. Figures for 1996/97 are, of course, not yet available.

Trunk Road Construction

Mr. Chris Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the schemes within the 1996 trunk road programme which are expected to commence construction between *(a)* 1 January 1997 and 31 March 1997, *(b)* 1 April 1997 and 30 June 1997, *(c)* 1 July 1997 and 30 September 1997, *(d)* 1 October 1997 and 31 December 1997 and 31 December 1997 and *(e)* 1 January 1996 and 31 March 1998. [8445]

Mr. Watts: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Chris Davies, dated 16 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent question asking if he will list the schemes within the 1996 Trunk Road Programme which are expected to commence construction between (a) 1 January and 31 March 1997, (b) 1 April and 30 June 1997, (c) 1 July and 30 September 1997, (d) 1 October and 31 December 1997 and (e) 1 January and 31 March 1998.

Contracts for two schemes on the A12 (Hackney Wick–M11 Contracts 1 and 3) were let on 14 November 1996. It is likely that they will commence construction during one of the periods listed but I am not able to give a more precise date at the present time.

Contracts have also been signed for eight Private Finance Initiative (PFI) Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) projects during 1996. Construction has already started on nine of the eleven schemes included in these DBFO contracts, and the A19 Norton-Parkway Interchange Improvement and M40 Junctions 1A–3 Widening are both expected to start early next year.

For all schemes included in a DBFO project, it is for the DBFO company to determine the construction programme. However, the shadow toll regime is structured to include strong incentives for early construction.

Official Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of the Ministers in his

Department how many official ministerial visits they have undertaken since 1 January; and how many of these have been abroad. [9381]

Sir George Young: Since 1 January, Transport Ministers have undertaken the following official ministerial visits:

Secretary of State for Transport

39 visits in the UK

4 visits abroad (including one to the EC Transport Council).

Minister for Railways, Roads and Local Transport

55 visits in the UK

2 visits abroad (both to the EC Transport Council).

Minister for Transport in London and Road Safety

28 visits in UK

2 visits abroad.

Minister for Aviation and Shipping

14 visits in UK

6 visits abroad (including two to the EC Transport Council).

Management Objectives

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the annual management objectives for each of his Department's divisions. [8327]

Sir George Young *[pursuant to his reply, 10 December 1996 Official Report column 103]:* I have now agreed the following revised aims for my Department:

Statement of Purpose

To promote safe, efficient and environmentally sustainable transport for people and goods, responding to the individual's need for mobility and supporting economic growth.

Aims

The Department will seek to:

Reduce transport-related deaths and injuries by promoting safety and security, providing rescue services and investigating accidents;

Reduce the damaging effects of transport on the environment by promoting sustainable growth and greater use of public transport, and by preventing, reducing and dealing effectively with pollution;

Improve choice, quality, value and accessibility for transport users by promoting competition wherever practicable and creating opportunities for transport providers, by investing in and making better use of existing infrastructure, and by encouraging transport providers to make their services accessible to all.

In pursuing these aims and broader Government aims the Department will:

Carry out tax-collecting, licensing, standard-setting, regulatory, enforcement, grant-payment, contingency planning and other functions efficiently and fairly, maintaining a high standard of service;

Keep Parliament and the public informed about transport policies and developments, and monitor their impact;

Promote effectively UK interests in the European Union and other international bodies and in bilateral relations;

Work effectively with local authorities, law enforcement agencies, other Government Departments and other organisations in both the public and private sector;

Create opportunities for all its staff and ensure they are equipped with the skills they need;

Manage its resources efficiently and effectively.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Jobseeker's Allowance (Charities)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the impact of the jobseeker's allowance on charities which previously relied on unemployed people working voluntarily. [8075]

Mr. Forth: We do not expect the replacement of unemployment benefit and income support with the jobseeker's allowance to have any adverse impact on charities which previously relied on unemployed people working voluntarily.

As with unemployment benefit and income support for unemployed people, there is no limit on the hours a person may undertake voluntary work while in receipt of jobseeker's allowance, so long as they are actively seeking work and available for work at 48 hours' notice—rather than the normal requirement to be immediately available.

Professorial Pay

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average level of professorial pay in the university sector currently; and what it was in 1980. [8941]

Mr. Forth: According to the new earnings survey, the average level of gross weekly earnings of full-time male "university and polytechnic teaching professionals" in April 1996 was £577. The average level of gross weekly pay for the closest comparator group—full-time male university academics—in 1980 was £250. This is the equivalent of £474 at 1996 prices.

Truancy

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list the total number of truancies in days per year for each of the last three years for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in Sheffield; and if she will make a statement. [8919]

Mr. Forth: Regular school attendance is important for pupils' progress, but the data collected for the performance tables now published each autumn show that significant amounts of valuable learning time are lost due to unauthorised absence. Rates of unauthorised absence at maintained schools in Sheffield for the last three years were about twice the national average, as follows:

Unauthorised absence in maintained primary schools

	percentage of half days missed		*average number of half days missed per absent pupil*	
School year	*Sheffield LEA*	*England average*	*Sheffield LEA*	*England average*
1993–94	1.0	0.5	13	11
1994–95	1.1	0.5	14	10
1995–96	1.2	0.5	13	10

Source:

DfEE National Pupil Absence Tables 1994, 1995 and 1996.

Unauthorised absence in maintained secondary schools

School Year	Percentage of half days missed		Average number of half days missed per absent pupil	
	Sheffield LEA	England average	Sheffield LEA	England average
1993–94	1.9	0.9	30	22
1994–95	1.9	1.0	29	22
1995–96	2.3	1.0	29	21

Source:
DfEE National Pupil Absence Tables 1994, 1995 and 1996.

Schools (Wiltshire)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when schools inspectors last visited *(a)* Fovant school; *(b)* Dinton school and *(c)* Barford St. Martin school in Wiltshire. [8900]

Mr. Robin Squire: Fovant church of England first school was inspected under the statutory four-year cycle by Ofsted-registered inspectors between 3 and 5 October 1994, and Barford St. Martin's church of England first school between 19 and 21 September 1994. Dinton first church of England school is due to be inspected by Ofsted in February 1997.

Members of Her Majesty's inspectorate visited Fovant school in April 1996 and Dinton school in connection with Wiltshire local education authority's proposals for Fovant and Dinton schools in October 1996.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools in Wiltshire have been given grant-maintained status during 1996. [8901]

Mr. Forth: Four schools in the Wiltshire local education authority area have become grant maintained since 1 January 1996.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if Wiltshire local education authority has expressed itself *(a)* in favour of closure of the Fovant school and *(b)* against grant-maintained status for the school. [8902]

Mr. Squire: Wiltshire local education authority published proposals to cease to maintain Fovant school on 16 May. The authority has made a statutory objection to the proposals for grant-maintained status published by the governing body of the school.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people have made representations to her or to her Department *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against grant-maintained status for Fovant school in Wiltshire. [8903]

Mr. Squire: My right hon. Friend has received two statutory objections to the proposals for grant-maintained status for Fovant school, and one non-statutory objection.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people have made representations to her or to her Department *(a)* in favour and *(b)* against closure of Fovant school in Wiltshire. [8904]

Mr. Squire: My right hon. Friend has received 11 statutory objections to the proposals to close Fovant school, including one from the governing body of the school.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the original application for grant-maintained status from the governors of Fovant school in Wiltshire was dated; when it was recorded as received by her Department; and when she expects to reach a decision. [8905]

Mr. Squire: Proposals for the acquisition of grant-maintained status for Fovant schools were published on 29 February 1996, and a copy received in the Department on the same date. My right hon. Friend will reach a decision as soon as is compatible with full consideration of all the relevant issues, including the separate local education authority proposals to choose the school.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the target time scale for a decision on an application by a school for grant-maintained status. [8906]

Mr. Squire: We aim, so far as possible, to reach a decision on proposals for grant-maintained status where there are conflicting proposals by the local education authority, within five months; of publication of the authority's proposals.

Training for Work

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the proportion of training for work leavers who six months after leaving were *(a)* in a full-time job with their work-experience employer, *(b)* in a full-time job with another employer, *(c)* employed in their own business, *(d)* in a part-time job, *(e)* in voluntary work, *(f)* on another Government training programme, *(g)* on a full-time education or training course, *(h)* unemployed and claiming benefit, *(i)* unemployed and not claiming benefit and *(j)* doing something else in the most recent period for which figures are available; and what was the proportion of training for work leavers who completed the training agreed in their initial action plan. [3928]

Mr. Plaice *[holding answer 20 November 1996]:* The information requested is given in the following table.

Table 1: Training for Work
All leavers — outcome six months after leaving training

England and Wales	April 1995–February 1996. Per cent.
In a full-time job with their work experience employer	11
In a full-time job with another employer	16
Self-employed	3
In a part-time job	10
On another government training programme	2
On a full-time education or training course	3
Unemployed and claiming benefit	42
Unemployed and not claiming benefit	5
Voluntary work	4
Something else	5
Completed programme of agreed training	69

Source:
TfW national follow-up survey

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much her Department plans to spend on celebrating Christmas and the new year. [7574]

Mr. Robin Squire *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* It is not possible to disaggregate this information except at disproportionate cost, although such costs are included in the running cost expenditure for this Department which is published in the annual report.

Hospital Education Units

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many education units for school age in-patients there were in NHS trusts in England in each of the last five years. [8478]

Mrs. Gillan: This information is not held centrally. However, the following table shows the number of hospital schools in England in each of the last five years:

1992: 42
1993: 40
1994: 38
1995: 31
1996: 27.

PRIME MINISTER

Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his speech at the Lisbon summit of 2 December, if he will make a statement on the role of the parliamentary assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and in respect of the expansion of the activities of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. [8647]

The Prime Minister: I represented the United Kingdom at the summit meeting of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe in Lisbon on 2 and 3 December, accompanied by my right hon. and learned Friend, the Foreign Secretary. The meeting adopted the Lisbon summit declaration and the Lisbon declaration on a common and comprehensive security model for Europe for the 21st century. Copies of these documents will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

The summit welcomed a separate decision on the mandate for negotiation next year on modernising the treaty on conventional forces in Europe.

In the margins of the summit, I had discussions with several Heads of State and Government, including the Presidents of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, Chancellor Kohl of Germany, Prime Minister Chernomyrdin of Russia and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel.

Prospects for strengthening European security in the next century were the theme of many speeches to the summit and of my bilateral meetings. I explained to Prime Minister Chernomyrdin not only that enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union would be evolutionary transparent processes, but our strong conviction that European security for the future should be built in partnership with Russia.

The declaration on the security model includes a decision to consider developing a charter on European security which can serve the needs of our peoples in the new century. The United Kingdom will contribute actively to this work. We shall emphasise the need for security organisations which adhere to OSCE commitments to work together, as in Bosnia, to defuse tension, prevent conflict, and build prosperous, democratic civil society throughout Europe.

The Lisbon declaration draws attention to the OSCE's expanding role in conflict prevention, management and resolution, including particularly the high commissioner on national minorities and long-term missions in countries such as Moldavia and Georgia. The parliamentary assembly contributes to this effort particularly through its election monitoring programme. The Lisbon declaration confirmed moreover, that the OSCE would continue to play an important role in the consolidation of peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1997.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Straw: To ask the Attorney-General how many *(a)* lawyers, *(b)* administrative staff and *(c)* others have been employed by the Crown Prosecution Service in each year since its establishment. [8677]

The Attorney-General: In each year since its establishment, the Crown Prosecution Service has employed staff in the following numbers.

	Lawyers	*Administrative staff*	*Legal trainees*	*Casual staff*	*Total*
1 August 1986	939.0	1,031.0	0	n/a	1,970.0
1 January 1987	1,234.5	2.007.0	0	n/a	3,241.5
1 January 1988	1,289.0	2,529.0	0	n/a	3,818.0
1 January 1989	1,410.0	2,743,5	0	n/a	4,153.5
1 January 1990	1,552.0	3,189.5	27	181.5	4,950.0
1 January 1991	1,690.0	3,294.0	111	182.0	5,277.0
1 January 1992	1,939.0	3,724.0	106	138.5	5,907.5
1 January 1993	2,141.0	3,925.5	130	220.0	6,416.5
1 January 1994	2,211.5	3.974.0	123	235.0	6,543.5
1 January 1995	2,241.5	4,067.0	101	276.5	6,686.0
1 January 1996	2,148.5	3,963.0	76	234.0	6,421.5
1 December 1996	2,019.0	3,785.5	57	146	6,007.5

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8533]

The Deputy Prime Minister *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* For these purposes, my office forms part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8550]

Mr. Bates *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* The Civil Service Appeals Board has made three new appointments and 10 reappointments during 1996. Of these, two of the new appointees and three of the reappointees were first identified by the public appointments unit.

The deregulation task force has made two new appointments and the Security Commission has made two reappointments during 1996: none was identified by PAU.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what role his Department has in respect of applications for new nuclear power stations; and if he will make a statement. [8463]

Mr. Page *[holding answer 11 December 1996]:* Proposals for new power stations in England and Wales over 50 MWs in capacity require my Department's consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989. All such applications are considered on their individual merits against the background of a policy that, as a general rule, matters such as the need for a generating station, its capacity, choice of fuel used and type of plant are commercial matters for the applicant.

Coal Industry

Mr. Rogers (Rhondda)**:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many claims have been settled under the coal industry pneumoconiosis compensation scheme in each year since its inception. [8351]

Mr. Page: This is a matter for the British Coal Corporation. I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

Radiation Experiments

Mr. Rendel: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what radiation experiments on humans involving British volunteers the Atomic Energy Authority has conducted or is conducting. [8866]

Mr. Page: Details are contained in AEA Technology's radiological protection research annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what involvement his Department currently has in radiation experiments on humans. [8865]

Mr. Page: None.

Electrical Goods (Home Repairs)

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has to introduce legislation to provide consumer protection for repairs on electrical goods carried out in homes. [8843]

Mr. John M. Taylor: Under the Sale and Supply of Goods Act 1982, traders who repair electrical goods, whether on their business premises or at consumers' homes, are required to do so with reasonable care and skill and within a reasonable time. Failure to do so amounts to a breach of contract for which the consumer may seek redress. We have no plans to introduce further legislation.

Hawk Aircraft (Indonesia)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if Hawk training aircraft destined for Indonesia are being converted into ground-attack aircraft in the United Kingdom. [5914]

Mr. Lang: As announced to the House on 21 November, an export licence has been issued for the supply of a further 16 Hawk aircraft to Indonesia. These aircraft, which are to be supplied for external defence, have a range of capabilities, including ground attack. This was taken into account when the export licence application was considered.

Neither this case, nor in respect of the first consignment, has there been modification of trainer aircraft destined for Indonesia into ground attack aircraft in the United Kingdom.

Crown Agents

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Crown Agents and its subsidiary companies require export licences when exporting or trans-shipping military, security, police or paramilitary equipment or services. [8656]

Mr. Nelson: The Crown Agents and its subsidiary companies are subject to the same licensing requirements as UK-registered companies.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the Crown Agents and its subsidiary companies required export licences prior to privatisation when exporting or trans-shipping military, security, police or paramilitary equipment or services. [8657]

Mr. Nelson: The Crown Agents and its subsidiary companies are subject to the same licensing requirements as UK-registered companies. Privatisation will not affect this position.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if a British-based company is required to apply for an export licence for military, security, police or

paramilitary goods or equipment when the goods or equipment are to be exported or shipped by the Crown Agents. [8658]

Mr. Nelson: Where placing a contract and also arranging shipping, the Crown Agents would normally apply for any licence required. Where the Crown Agents act purely as a freight forwarder, the supplier of the goods concerned would have to apply for any necessary licence.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if a British-based company was required to apply for an export licence for military, security, police or paramilitary goods or equipment when the goods or equipment were exported or shipped by the Crown Agents prior to the privatisation of the Crown Agents. [8659]

Mr. Nelson: Where placing a contract and also arranging shipping, the Crown Agents would normally apply for any licence required. Where the Crown Agents act purely as a freight forwarder, the supplier of the goods concerned would have to apply for any necessary licence. Privatisation will not affect the licensing requirements.

Personal Business Advisers

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what monitoring procedures are in place to ensure that there are adequate safeguards against personal business advisers recommending services solely to generate income for themselves. [8940]

Mr. Page: In order to become accredited, a business link must demonstrate to an independent assessor that the advice given by a personal business adviser and other advisers is both impartial and independent. To do this it must follow the guidelines on the independence of advice to customers set out in D47—D49 of the "Business Link Service Guide".

This includes, among others:

Outside their counselling and diagnostic role, PBAs and other advisers should have no personal interest in the supplier recommended or chosen.

PBA targets should not include any that link a PBA's pay to performance measured by the volume of services taken up by customers, or to earning money for the business link or its partners. The same should also apply to others wholly or substantially involved in advising customers under the business link brand.

Business Breakfasts

Mr. Hoon: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of the first two business breakfasts held on 11 November at Luton and Lincoln. [4294]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 November 1996]:* The cost of catering, presentational materials and hire of venues for the two events including VAT, has now been confirmed as £8,780.

Office of Science and Technology

Mr. Ingram: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of commissioning the Coopers and Lybrand review of the dual support transfer for the Office of Science and Technology. [8889]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Excluding VAT, the Office of Science and Technology—OST—paid Coopers and Lybrand in total £81,862.16, comprising £76,650.00 consultant fees, £4,022.16 for expenses and £1,190 for 700 copies of the final report. VAT amounted to £14,325.88. The associated administrative costs to OST is making and managing this contract were covered routinely within the office's running costs budget.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the role of Mr. A, Mr. B, and Mr. C, whose names have been supplied to him, in the application for a regional selective assistance grant by Synex Ltd. [6234]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 27 November 1996]:* In the application by Synex Ltd, Mr. A. provided independent accountancy advice under the terms of his contract with the Government Office for the South West. Further details are contained in my reply of 10 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *87-88*.

Mr. B. and Mr. C. were, at the time of the Synex application, both members of the South West industrial development board—SWIDB—which provides independent advice on applications for regional selective assistance. The board comprises senior business people with wide experience of commerce and industry who, like Mr. B. and Mr. C., voluntarily give their time freely in support of the important work that the SWIDB performs. Details of the attendance of Mr. B and Mr. C at board meetings which considered the Synex case are contained in my replies of 10 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *88*.

I understand that it is also the case that Mr. B and Mr. C had some private discussions with Synex Ltd. They were responsible for declaring any interests which may have arisen from these discussion and my replies of 10 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *88* reflect the outcome of this.

The decision on the Synex case was taken by my Department on 19 May 1995. The company appealed against the decision on 31 May 1995 and Mr. C provided advice to the Government Office for the South West on 29 June 1995 as part of a further technical assessment. Although Mr. C had previously declared an interest in the case and had not participated in board discussions leading up to the decision, the Government office believed that he could properly make a contribution at this stage on the technical aspects alone. The Department's decision to reject the case was confirmed on 31 July 1995.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what regulations prevent members of an industrial development board from advising the DTI on the merits of an RSA application while giving paid advice to the same applicant. [6230]

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 27 November 1996]:* Appointments to the industrial development boards are made in accordance with the Cabinet Office's guide to public appointments procedures and the Treasury code of best practice for board members of public bodies. These cover avoidance of potential conflicts of interest and, among other things, prevent board members from offering advice on the merits of an RSA application on which they had received payment for advising the applicant. Members are required to provide the Government Offices with a list of current interest such as directorships and

the deaths of a black person in police custody or prison custody there were in each of the last five years; and what were the causes of death. [8680]

Mr. Sackville: The information regarding deaths in police custody is not held centrally. I understand that the verdicts of inquests regarding relevant deaths in prison arising since details have been collected are as follows:

1994

Three natural causes, one suicide, one inquest outstanding;

1995

Two natural causes, four suicides, one misadventure, one open, three inquests outstanding;

1996 (to 11 December)

Two natural causes, two inquests outstanding.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many police stations a black person has died while in custody during the last five years; [8681]

(2) how many deaths in police custody in England and Wales of *(a)* black, *(b)* Asian and *(c)* Irish people there were in each of the last five years. [8679]

Mr. Maclean: These figures are not held centrally. In previous years, police forces have not been required to report the ethnic background of people who die in police custody. That information has been required since April 1996 and will be included in future annual published statistics.

Police (Suicide Awareness)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training in suicide awareness police officers receive in England and Wales. [8684]

Mr. Maclean: It is for individual chief officers to determine the extent to which their officers are trained to carry out their duties. The foundation course for probationer constables seeks to establish a general awareness and understanding of the mental and physical condition of people they encounter. The possibility of people in custody committing suicide is dealt with in greater depth in the custody officer training package which is available to all forces.

Prison Health Service

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to integrate the prison health service into the national health service. [8685]

Miss Widdecombe: There are no current plans to integrate the health care service for prisoners with the national health service.

We are, however, committed to improving health care for prisoners and believe that there is considerable potential for achieving better health services and better value for money by contracting with the NHS and other providers.

CS Gas

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to authorise the use of CS gas by members of the Prison Service. [8286]

Miss Widdecombe: There are no current proposals to authorise the Use of CS spray by members of the Prison Service.

Prison Staff (Injuries)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison staff have been injured due to physical assault from inmates in England and Wales; how many of these cases were pursued in the courts; and how many were dealt with under prison rule 47 in each year since 1990. [8051]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. John Battle, dated 13 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many prison staff have been injured due to physical assault from inmates in England and Wales; how many of these cases were pursued in the courts; and how many were dealt with under Prison Rule 47 in each year since 1990.

The Prison Service expanded its Incident Reporting System to include the monitoring of injuries resulting from physical assaults by inmates from September 1995. Information prior to this date was not centrally recorded, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The number of reported injuries sustained by prison staff for each month since September 1995 is given in the attached table.

Information concerning cases of assaults by inmates which were pursued through the courts is not collected centrally and could also only be provided at disproportionate cost.

It is not possible to differentiate between inmates who have been dealt with under Prison Rule 47 in cases of assault on prison staff that have resulted in physical injury separately from those where no physical injury was sustained. The number of assaults on prison staff and others proven at adjudication in each year since 1990 are provided in the attached table.

Assaults on prison staff resulting in injury

	Serious injury	*Other physical injury*	*Total*
1995			
September	11	30	41
October	13	35	48
November	5	31	36
December	11	36	47
1996			
January	13	42	55
February	7	40	47
March	3	41	44
April	5	53	58
May	3	52	55
June	7	46	53
July	2	59	61
August	5	31	36
September	3	36	39
October	1	34	35
November	4	48	52
Total	93	614	707

All assaults on prison staff and others proven at adjudication

	Number
1990	1,884
1991	2,118
1992	2,398

All assaults on prison staff and others proven at adjudication

	Number
1993	2,976
1994	3,334
1995	2,990
1996[1]	2,194

Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the criteria for placing a convicted inmate in *(a)* an open prison and *(b)* a closed prison, with particular reference to the length of sentence; and if he will make a statement. [8517]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 13 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the criteria by which convicted prisoners are placed in closed or open prisons.

The criteria used are set out in guidance contained in the enclosed Circular Instructions 7/1988 and 2/1991 issued by the Prison Service. Copies of these are available in the Library.

Child Prostitution

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish a task force to make recommendations to address the problem of child prostitution. [8427]

Mr. Maclean: We have no plans to do so. We believe that the present law is adequate to deal with those who exploit child prostitutes.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to increase the penalties for those convicted of *(a)* enticing children into prostitution and *(b)* living off the earnings of child prostitutes; [8428]

(2) what plans he has to increase the penalties for those convicted of living on immoral earnings. [8426]

Mr. Maclean: The maximum penalty for an offence of living on the earnings of prostitution, whether adult or child, is seven years' imprisonment. Two years' imprisonment is the maximum penalty for causing or encouraging prostitution of a girl under 16. There is no evidence that these maximum penalties are insufficient for the most serious cases of these offences.

Seat Belts

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many drivers have been prosecuted for allowing a child under 14 years to travel in a vehicle without wearing a seat belt or legal restraint in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [8231]

(2) how many drivers have been prosecuted for allowing a child under 14 years to travel in a vehicle without wearing a seat belt or legal restraint in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [8232]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 12 December 1996]:* It is not possible, in the statistics held centrally, to distinguish between passengers or drivers prosecuted for not wearing seat belts, nor whether children under 14 were involved.

The following table gives the available information. As the vast majority of seat belt offences are dealt with by the issue of a fixed penalty notice, the table includes figures for these also.

Driving or riding in a motor vehicle while not wearing a seat belt

England and Wales, 1991–1995

	Wales		*England and Wales*	
	Number of prosecutions	*Number of fixed penalties*	*Number of prosecutions*	*Number of fixed penalties*
1991	498	n/a	12,156	n/a
1992	379	5,682	11,258	102,322
1993	337	4,184	9,687	106,153
1994	345	4,807	8,715	114,712
1995	334	6,304	8,574	126,251

Wolds Prison

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the contract for the management of Wolds prison, indicating the original terms of the renewal of the contract for the management of the prison and the terms and completion details of any agreed renewal of the contract. [7505]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Pearson to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 13 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the renewal of the contract for the management of Wolds prison.

The contract came into operation in April 1992 and, subject to satisfactory performance, is capable of renewal up to a maximum term of 14 years from that date. The initial five year term expires on 5 April 1997. In view of the Prison Service's satisfaction with the level of service provided and the result of negotiations about

Letter from Tina Holt to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 16 December 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many new claims for unemployment-related benefits have been made by claimants living in the York travel-to-work area, and how many claimants have made at least one new claim for unemployment-related benefits since April 1992.

The database used to complete this analysis does not contain ward level data and therefore information can not be provided for true travel-to-work areas. However, information can be provided by jobcentre best-fit travel-to-work areas.

Since 1 April 1992, an estimated 50,040 new claims for unemployment-related benefits have been made by claimants registering at York Clifford Street Employment Service Jobcentre or York Stonebow Employment Service Jobcentre.

The estimated number of claimants who have experienced at least one new spell of claimant unemployment at both of these jobcentres, since 1 April 1992, is 28,580.

Typical Family (Definition)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the definition of a typical family used by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [8247]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 11 December 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibiiity of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 16 December 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the definition of a typical family.

The Office for National Statistics does not define a "typical family". In the General Household Survey (GHS), the source of most statistics on families, a family is defined as:

(a) a married or opposite sex cohabiting couple on their own or

(b) a married or opposite sex cohabiting couple/lone parent and their never-married children, provided these children have no children of their own.

Persons who cannot be allocated to a family as defined above are said to be persons not in a family although they could be related to one or more family members.

The type of family which is relatively most numerous depends on the classification of families which is used, but from the 1994 GHS, of all the families defined above (and where the family head was resident in Great Britain and aged under 60):

21% were married couples with no children

6% were opposite sex cohabiting couples with no children

50% were married couples with children

4% were opposite sex cohabiting couples with children

18% were lone parents families with children

(Due to rounding the percentages do not total to 100)

An analysis of the trends, numbers and characteristics of families was recently published in an article entitled *Population Review: (6) Families and households in Great Britain* which appeared in *Population Trends 85*, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

"Financial Statement and Budget Report"

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 6 December, *Official Report*, columns *835–36*, for what reason the Department of Natinal Heritage is excluded from the table. [8740]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 December 1996]:* The Department of Natinal Heritage was excluded in error and an incorrect figure was inadvertently given for Legal Departments. The complete table should have read as follows:

£ million	*1996–97*
Defence	40
FCO/ODA	0
Agriculture	0
DTI	[1]—
DfEE	0
Transport	550
Environment	80
Home Office	120
Legal (LCD)	10
National Heritage	[1]—
Health	70
Social Security	130
Scotland and Forestry Commission	30
Wales	20
Northern Ireland	10
Chancellor's departments	30
Local authorities	50
TOTAL	1,130

[1] Less than £10 million.

Inland Revenue

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the review of the Inland Revenue executive officers' framework documents is complete; and if he will make a statement. [9702]

Mr. Jack: Following completion of the next steps evaluation review of its executive office structure earlier this year, the Inland Revenue has now revised its executive offices' framework documents in line with the findings of that review.

The department's internal services have been reorganised following the transfer of information technology functions to its strategic partner—Electronic Data Systems—and the department's senior management review. This has resulted in a decrease in the number of service executive offices. From 1 January 1997 the department will have 20 operational and four service executive offices.

Copies of each of the executive offices' framework documents—which set out the statutory, policy and resources frameworks within which the offices operate—will be placed in the Libraries of the House shortly.

Ecstasy

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many deaths that involved *(a)* ecstasy as the sole drug concerned and *(b)* alcohol poisoning, occurred after the victims consumed the substances (i) in clubs, (ii) in public houses, (iii) at raves and (iv) elsewhere, in each of the last five years. [6627]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 2 December 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 16 December 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many deaths resulted from ecstasy, or poisoning from alcohol after the victims consumed the substances in (i) clubs (ii) public houses (iii) raves and (iv) elsewhere, in each of the last five years.

ONS do not hold this level of detail as to where the substance which caused the death was consumed. The information is not recorded on the death certificate nor by the coroner, and would be very difficult to record with any degree of accuracy. Alcohol, for example, may have been consumed in a number of different places.

The following table shows, (a) the numbers of deaths where Ecstasy was the sole drug mentioned and (b) the numbers of deaths from alcohol poisoning, in England and Wales in the last five years.

Year	*Deaths from ecstasy*[1]	*Deaths from alcohol poisoning*[2]
1991	6	152
1992	5	126
1993	12	138
1994	10	123
1995	15	130

[1] Deaths in which ecstasy was the only drug mentioned on the death certificate. None of these deaths included mention of alcohol.
[2] International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision, code 980.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fisheries Offences (Prosecutions)

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the successful prosecutions for fisheries offences undertaken by his Department since 1 January which have resulted in fines of £5,000 or more, including details of the fishing vessels involved, country of registration and the offences committed. [9432]

Mr. Baldry: A list of the successful prosecutions and the details requested are set out in the following table. Where appropriate, the fines relate to the total fines against both the master and owner of the vessel. There are other prosecution cases, but these are the subject of an appeal and are not therefore included in the table.

Month of prosecution	*Vessel*	*Offence*	*Total fines £*	*Country of Registration*
January	NORINA	Fishing logbook	10,000	United Kingdom
	LADY T. EMIEL	Fishing logbook	10,000	UK
	LE DERBY	Fishing in six-mile limit	17,500	France
	ANTAEUS	Fishing in six-mile limit	22,500	France
February	CHRISTINA	Fishing logbook and landing declaration	27,500	UK
March	NICOLA ANNE	Quota and landing declaration	11,000	UK
	ZEEDUIVEL	Gear and undersize fish offences	9,000	Belgium
	TIJL	Fishing 12-mile limit	7,500	Belgium
	MARILYN JANE	Fishing logbook	5,500	UK
April	BAFFIN BAY	Unlicensed fishing	5,000	UK
	KVITSJOEN	Quota	5,000	Norway
	FISKEBERG	Quota	6,000	Norway
	VAN DIJCK	Fishing logbook	5,000	Belgium
May	ATLANTIC C	Quota	9,500	UK
June	AROSA	Quota	12,000	UK
July	ITXAS	Fishing logbook and undersize fish	15,000	UK
	MOUNT EDEN	Quota	67,500	UK
	SOPHIE LOUISE	Fishing logbook and landing declaration	17,000	UK
August	MERCURIUS	Gear and undersize fish	8,000	Belgium
September	ROWNLEA	quota	8,000	UK
	TITAN	Quota	8,000	UK
	FLOURISH	Fishing logbook	11,000	UK
October	ATLANTIC C	Licensing and quota	30,000	UK
November	AMARADIA	Transhipment licence and statutory declaration	34,000	Cyprus
December	ALMA C	Fishing logbook and landing declaration	10,000	UK

Cattle Cull

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *580*, if he will list methods of disposal that are *(a)* permitted and *(b)* currently in operation for (i) condensate and (ii) wash water from the rendering of cattle slaughtered under the 30-month scheme. [8799]

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 12 December 1996]:* Most wash water and condensate from rendering plants is discharged to sewer. Such discharges are regulated by sewerage undertakers, who are empowered by the Water Industry Act 1991 to impose a wide range of conditions on the discharge consent issued to an individual plant.

A small number of rendering plants discharge wash water and condensate, after treatment, to controlled waters or to land. Discharges of this kind are subject to regulation by the Environment Agency, under the Water Resources Act 1991 or the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

The methods of disposal specified in consents and licences will vary according to the circumstances and full weight is always given in determining such consents and licences to the need to protect public health and the environment. Dischargers who fail to comply with relevant discharge consents or licence conditions are liable to prosecution and other regulatory action.

All rendering plants involved in the scheme are approved under the Animal By-Products Order 1992, as amended, which implements EU rendering standards, and the Specified Bovine Material (No. 3) Order 1996.

Beef Producers

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what additional assistance he has produced to beef producers during the last six months. [9040]

Mr. Baldry: United Kingdom farmers have received additional direct financial assistance totalling nearly £110 million. In addition, the advance payments under the suckler cow and beef special premium schemes have been paid at a rate of 80 per cent. rather than the normal 60 per cent. Market support measures, such as the expanded intervention coverage for beef and the calf processing scheme, have also served to enhance producers' income.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to amend the system of subsidies in respect of farmers who buy rather than breed beef animals. [8956]

Mr. Baldry: Producers who buy male cattle to fatten for slaughter are currently able to claim under the beef special premium scheme, subject to observance of scheme rules. Those who marketed adult cattle, including heifers, for slaughter for human consumption between 20 March and 30 June were able to claim additional subsidies worth £66.76 per head of cattle marketed. A second round of marketing payments is now available in respect of cattle marketed between 1 July and 30 September. Claims must be made before 8 January. The payment rate under this second phase in likely to be around £55 per head. I have no plans to alter this position or to seek any amendments to existing subsidy schemes for this category of producer.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the profit made on animals by beef producers during the last six months. [8957]

Mr. Baldry: Beef profitability varies widely and depends on the farm type and production system. Various estimates of annual profitability are published each March in "Farm Incomes in the United Kingdom".

Fishing Regulations

Mr. Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, (1) pursuant to his answer of 3 December, *Official Report*, column *625*, on buying and selling fishing quotas and licences, when his Department first authorised the sale of fish quotas; [8954]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 3 December, *Official Report*, column *625*, on buying and selling fishing quotas and licences, what rights of ownership over a fish quota are transferred when that quota is exchanged between fishermen's groups. [8955]

Mr. Baldry: The Ministry has not authorised the sale of fish quotas. Fishermen's groups are free to swap or transfer between themselves quota allocated to them annually subject to the approval of the Fisheries Departments. No one has ownership rights over United Kingdom quotas.

Quota Hopping

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he plans to take to sustain the present level of fishing effort in the period before the determination of the quota-hopping issue. [8958]

Mr. Baldry: Discussions are still taking place in the Fisheries Council on the need for reductions in fishing effort following the expiry of the current multi-annual guidance programme at the end of this year. We are also continuing to press for treaty changes in the intergovernmental conference to deal with the problem of quota hoppers. I have, however, made it clear that I am not prepared to contemplate any further compulsory capacity or effort controls on UK fishermen while these issues remain unresolved.

Genetically Engineered Food

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the percentage of imported foodstuffs which will contain genetically engineered ingredients in *(a)* January 1997 and *(b)* January 1998; and if he will make a statement. [8960]

Mr. Browning: Of the 1996 USA soya bean harvest, about 2 per cent. has come from genetically modified plants, this is anticipated to rise to 10 per cent. in 1997. Of the 1996 USA maize harvest, approximately 0.6 per cent. comprised genetically modified plants and it is expected that in 1997 this will rise to 5 per cent.

Other countries are planting genetically modified crops next year. The level of imports into the UK cannot be predicted with any accuracy at this time.

Cattle Insemination

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what powers his Ministry has to require minimum standards of training, and permanent contract conditions, for inseminators for cattle AI programmes; and if he will make a statement. [9179]

Mrs. Browning: Provisions relating to the training and business status of inseminators for cattle AI are included in regulation 24(b) of the Artificial Insemination of Cattle (Animal Health) (England and Wales) Regulations 1985. Any breach of these regulations constitutes an offence under section 10(6) of the Animal Health and Welfare Act 1984.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

8. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress has been made to ensure that lottery funds can be used for expenditure on items other than capital items. [7607]

Mr. Sproat: The National Lotteries Charities Board and the Millennium Commission have always been able to make revenue awards. In April, I announced changes to the policy directions to allow the Arts and Sports Councils to make revenue awards. The first arts and sports revenue programmes were announced in November. The National Heritage Bill will allow the heritage lottery fund the same flexibility.

14. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to increase the percentage of national lottery funds directed to good causes. [7608]

Mr. Sproat: None. The Director General of the National Lottery appointed Camelot as the operator of the national lottery because over the course of the licence it offered the best return to good causes. The National Audit Office reviewed the evaluation process and supported the director general's decision. The percentage of funds going to the good causes could be increased only through a change to the licence, with Camelot's agreement.

15. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will ensure that greater priority is given to projects benefiting children and young people in the distribution of lottery proceeds. [7609]

Mrs Virginia Bottomley: Young people and children are already benefiting greatly from the lottery. At least 1,500 awards, worth more than £175 million have already been made.

I directed the distributing bodies specifically to take the needs of young people into account when I issued a new policy directions to them in April this year.

The schemes launched last month by the Arts and Sports Councils under these directions will allow children and young people to benefit even further from the lottery.

19. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the total sum contributed by the national lottery to organisations, groups and charities in the borough of Southend-on-Sea. [7613]

Mrs. Bottomley: Twelve national lottery awards have been made in the borough of Southend-on-Sea with a total value of £2.3 million.

20. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the role of the national lottery in preserving the nation's historic churches. [7614]

Mr. Sproat: The national lottery provides a tremendous opportunity for the preservation of historic churches and cathedrals in this country. To date, the heritage lottery fund has made 121 grants totalling £14.8 million to preserve our ecclesiastical heritage.

The heritage lottery fund and English Heritage have also worked together to produce a single procedure whereby churches and other places of worship can apply for funding from both sources through a single route; £20 million a year could be available through this joint scheme which will make it easier for congregations to apply for funding.

24. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many grants the national lottery funding bodies have made to protect and conserve the nation's heritage since the inception of the lottery. [7619]

Mrs. Bottomley: The heritage lottery fund, which has responsibility for allocating lottery proceeds specifically to projects concerned with the protection and conservation of the nation's heritage, has made 604 grants totalling £368 million.

27. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations she has received about the effect on smaller charities of the national lottery; and if she will make a statement. [7622]

Mrs. Bottomley: The introduction of the national lottery has given charities and voluntary organisations of all sizes unparalleled opportunities to secure significant new funding for projects and initiatives across a wide range of activities. While I have received many representations about the effect of the national lottery on small charities, it is too early to say or to identify what other effects, if any, the national lottery is having on charities' incomes, and my Department is engaged in research into the matter. What is certain is that the lottery has led, and will lead, to hundreds of millions of pounds of additional money reaching charitable and voluntary organisations every year.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on national lottery awards to disadvantaged groups. [7612]

Mr. Sproat: The National Lottery Charities Board has made 5,160 awards, with a total value of £352 million to charitable, benevolent and philanthropic groups.

Millennium Bids

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage in respect of which national lottery millennium bids decisions have been deferred until March 1997; and if she will give the reason for the delayed announcements. [7170]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

16. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many projects supported by Millennium Commission awards are currently being taken forward. [7610]

Mrs. Bottomley: The Millennium Commission is taking forward into contract, construction and implementation 93 projects: 87 capital projects on 2,038 sites and six millennium award schemes. In addition, 58 first and second-round projects are under detailed consideration and 1,011 projects are at initial appraisal stage.

Cross-channel Transport

17. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will commission a study of the different cross-channel transport modes as means of promoting tourism to the United Kingdom. [7611]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The British Tourist Authority continues to research opportunities in Europe and to work closely with the airlines, ferry companies and channel tunnel operators to promote Britain as a tourist destination.

The growth in tourism from western Europe has been spectacular: it increased by 15 per cent. in 1995, and by 17 per cent. in the year to September 1996.

English Poetry

21. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to fund further public readings of English poetry. [7615]

Mr. Sproat: The Arts Council of England and the regional arts boards will spend nearly £3 million on literary activity this year, including supporting organisations which give public poetry readings. In addition, my right hon. Friend has announced the establishment of the national reading initiative to encourage more children to read more books, and the advisory panel will be advising on ways to take the scheme forward. This may include public readings of literature, inlcuding poetry.

Historic Buildings (London)

25. **Mr. Booth:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the safety of the oldest buildings of national importance in the cities of London and Westminster. [7620]

Mr. Sproat: Responsibility for the safety of old buildings of national importance lies principally with their owners. Where the buildings are in public use, or where the public has access, the local authority has responsibility for ensuring that the buildings meet current health and safety standards. Government Departments are individually responsible for the safety of those historic buildings which they occupy.

Historic Churches (Basildon)

26. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what recent representation she has received concerning grants to historic churches in Basildon. [7621]

Mr. Sproat: I have received no such representations.

Tourism

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the British tourism industry. [7617]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Last year, we reversed a 10-year trend by increasing our world market share of tourism, and we set a record for export earnings. We are set to break the record again in this year.

Tourism is forecast to create up to 1 million new jobs during the next 10 years. I am championing the importance of this key growth sector both within Government and more widely. I will launch the next phase of our tourism strategy in January.

Buckinghamshire County Museum and Art Gallery

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to pay an official visit to the Buckinghamshire county museum and art gallery to discuss developments at the museum. [7618]

Mr. Sproat: I have no such plans currently.

Volunteering

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to take forward the work of the "Make a Difference" initiative and for the promotion of volunteering. [9682]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer my hon. Friend to the oral answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Clywd, North-West (Mr. Richards) earlier today.

WRVS

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the proposed move of the head office of the Women's Royal Voluntary Service. [9683]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Women's Royal Voluntary Service is to move its head office from its present location in Stockwell road, Brixton, to the site of its new training centre, Milton Hill house in Oxfordshire. The cost of the new head office and the move are to be met by the WRVS trust. The surrender of the lease on the existing head office is to be financed by the use of £2 million accrued from the sale of other properties held in trust for the Crown by the Women's Royal Voluntary Service.

Parliamentary approval to this use of proceeds from the sale of other properties will be sought in supplementary estimates.

Television Violence

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals she has for increasing the powers of *(a)* Broadcasting Standards Council and *(b)* the Independent Television Commission in relation to violence on television. [8928]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[13 December 1996]:* The BSC and the ITC will be revising their codes relating to violence and other programming issues in 1997. Their existing statutory powers are sufficient to ensure that those revised codes are complied with.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what evidence her Department has recently evaluated on the amount of violence on television. [8930]

Mrs. Bottomley *[holding answer 13 December 1996]:* The BBC, ITC and BSC recently provided me with wide-ranging reports on violence on television and action taken to protect vulnerable viewers. The main source of

evidence provided on the amount of violence on television was a study by Sheffield university, funded by the ITC, the BSC, the BBC and other broadcasters, which suggests that the amount of violence on terrestrial television has fallen in recent years. We shortly expect further results from that study, taking in a wider range of channels.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals she has for introducing legislation to reduce the amount of violence on television. [8929]

Mrs. Bottomley *[holding answer 13 December 1996]:* Existing legislation, recently extended to new digital services by the Broadcasting Act 1996, sets a framework within which broadcasters and their regulators are responsible for the content and scheduling of programmes. There is no need to amend that legislation framework. I have recently agreed with the chairmen of the BBC, ITC and BSC a co-ordinated programme of action to meet public concern about levels of violence of television.

Charity Collections

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what recent consultation her Department has had with local authorities and charities concerning public charitable collections; and if she will make a statement; [8733]

(2) what plans she has to amend the Charities Act 1992 to introduce protection against fraudulent public charitable collections; and if she will make a statement; [8734]

(3) what estimate she has made of the total money donated to fraudulent public charitable collections in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [8735]

(4) when the regulations provided under part III of the Charities Act 1992 concerning public charity collections and referred to in the report, "Public Charitable Collections: Response to Consultation" will come into force; and if she will make a statement; [8887]

(5) what plans she has to institute London-wide regulations on decisions to prosecute for offences related to conducting charity collections in the street without a licence; and if she will make a statement. [8883]

Mr. Sproat: Good progress has been made in implementing the Charities Acts 1992 and 1993, most recently with the commencement on 1 March this year of the statutory framework for charity accounts and reports. Against that programme it has been necessary to delay bringing into force the provisions in part III of the Charities Act 1992, dealing with public charitable collections. This sought to rationalise existing law which provides separately for the licensing of street collections under the Police, Factories Etc. (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1916 and house to house collections under the House to House Collections Act 1939. Since this legislation is already in force, implementation of part III has been given lower priority than other parts of the 1992 and 1993 legislation, which introduced more substantial reforms.

A meeting on public charitable collections was held with practitioners from charities, local authorities and others on 28 February and my officials met with Westminster city council on 23 May. As indicated in the publication "Public Charitable Collections: Response to the Consultation", referred to by the hon. Member, the practical issues involved are complex and it is essential that these are fully considered in designing the regulations, guidance and accompanying practical arrangements before bringing part III into force.

Estimates of the total amount of money donated to fraudulent collections in each of the last five years are not available. In general, however, the public should be vigilant in responding to appeals, as to the charitable status of the organisation to which they are making a donation and as to the bona fides of the collector. The Charity Commission has recently issued a press release to warn people to give carefully to charities, especially at Christmas.

Part III of the Charities Act 1992 was amended by the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 to remove the maximum advance period for applications, in response to a recommendation of the deregulation task force on charities and voluntary organisations. There are no further plans to amend part III. It is already an offence to conduct an unlicensed street collection for charity in London, as it is in other areas for which local regulations have been made under the 1916 Act; in addition, criminal offences—for instance, obtaining property by deception—may be committed where collections take place falsely purporting to be for charity.

Portable Antiquities

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what action the Government intend to take in response to the discussion document on portable antiquities which her Department published in March. [9681]

Mr. Sproat: In the discussion document on portable antiquities published in February 1996, we sought views on proposals for a scheme for the recording of all archaeological finds, of which perhaps as many as 400,000 a year are currently being discovered, in the belief that there was an urgent need to improve the current arrangements. We received a total of 173 responses and I would like to pay tribute to the care which many of the respondents took with their replies. There is a great deal of invaluable advice in the responses which will guide us as we take the initiative forward. I would like in particular to single out the detailed statements from the standing conference on portable antiquities and the National Council for Metal Detecting. Copies of the responses have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Everyone who responded agreed on the importance of recording archaeological finds and on the need to improve the current arrangements, while the balance of opinion was strongly in favour of a voluntary rather than a compulsory system. This means that, for the first time, we have a broad consensus for the way in which this should be taken forward.

In the light of these responses and following further consultation by my Department, I can now announce that we intend to establish a two-year programme of pilot

schemes to commence on 1 September 1997 and that we are making £50,000 available for the eight-month period that falls within the year 1997–98. The scheme will be co-ordinated directly by this Department and the funding will be channelled through the Museums and Galleries Commission. The aim of the pilot schemes will be to enable an accurate estimate to be made of the resources that would be needed to extend the scheme across the whole of England. The funding will be directed towards employing additional staff in three or four areas to record finds. Our first step will be to invite any suitable body—museums, but also perhaps county planning departments or other archaeological bodies—to express an interest in bidding for funding and we intend to do this early in the new year.

WALES

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the current median waiting periods for patients needing *(a)* cataract treatment and *(b)* hip replacement treatment at each hospital where this operation is provided for patients whose operations are purchased by Welsh health authorities, and for Wales as a whole and the equivalent waiting times in each of the last two years; and if he will make a statement. [7467]

Mr. Hague: Information on the median waiting time for those patients who had the relevant treatment in each of the last three years is given in the following table. For each category only those hospitals where there is full information on waiting periods and more than 10 operations were performed have been included. The figures are for operations purchased by health authorities and GP fundholders in Wales.

Median waiting times (days) for treatment received, by purchasing organisation.

Hospital	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Cataract treatment			
Breconshire War Memorial	8	15	39
Bridgend General	312	165	150
Bronglais	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
East Glamorgan	211	205	79
Glan Clwyd General Hospital	103	68	72
Llwynpia	20	19	44
Morriston	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—
Nevil Hall	[2]—	[2]—	47
Prince Charles	115	278	366
Prince Philip	7	7	[1]—
Princess of Wales	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—
Royal Gwent	[2]—	[2]—	326
St. Woolos	195	190	[2]—
Singleton	76	93	194
University Hospital of Wales	81	113	109
Withybush General Hospital	31	267	[1]—
Wrexham Maelor Hospital	362	388	228
Ysbyty Gwynedd	106	210	159
Wales	96	94	95
Hip replacement treatment			
Aberdare	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—
Bronglais	2	40	7
Bridgend General	[2]—	[1]—	[2]—
Cardiff Royal Infirmary	126	115	[1]—
Caephilly District Miners	76	145	23
Cymla	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—
East Glamorgan	[1]—	[2]—	[1]—
Glan Clwyd General Hospital	242	193	175
Gorseinon	[2]—	[2]—	[1]—
Morriston	186	236	[1]—
Neath	59	78	[1]—
Nevill Hall	107	114	90
Princess of Wales	44	39	32
Prince Charles	355	286	167
Prince Philip	8	11	18
Royal Gwent	139	139	161
Tredegar	[2]—	[1]—	[1]—
Withybush General Hospital	463	400	286
Wrexham Maelor Hospital	160	133	167
Ysbyty Gwynedd	124	119	96
Wales	84	91	85

[1] No operations performed or full waiting period data not available.
[2] Less than 10 operations performed.

Housing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the change in the budget of Tai Cymru between 1996–97 and 1997–98 *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* expressed as a percentage. [7762]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The reduction in net capital expenditure between the 1996–97 and 1997–98 financial years is *(a)* £27.2 million; and *(b)* 29.9 per cent.

Sea Empress

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the study by Dr. Peter Dyrynda into the effects of the Sea Empress disaster; and if he will make a statement. [8043]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My right hon. Friend, established the Sea Empress environmental evaluation committee—SEEEC—to assess the environmental effects of the Sea Empress oil spill. Dr. Dyrynda's report, along with a number of others, is being considered by SEEEC whose final report is expected next year.

Ambulance Paramedics

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of whether the objective that ambulance trusts in Wales will provide one qualified paramedic on each emergency medical service ambulance by 1 January 1997 will be achieved. [9343]

Mr. Hague: This is assessed annually at the end of March. The latest position is set out in the Welsh Affairs Committee, Session 1995–96, third report on the training of ambulance paramedics printed on 24 July 1996 and in the Government's response printed on 30 October 1996. Copies are available in the Library of the House.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the final outturn figures for NHS expenditure in 1995–96 to be published. [9341]

Mr. Hague: Outturn figures for NHS expenditure in 1995–96 are in the appropriation account for Wales; and the summarised accounts of district health authorities, family health service authorities, the Welsh Health Common Services Authority, the Health Promotion Authority for Wales and NHS trusts in Wales. It is the

responsibility of the Comptroller and Auditor General to lay copies of these accounts before both Houses of Parliament.

Care in the Community

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the Welsh local government associations concerning the transfer arrangements for funding care in the community from 1 April 1997; how much additional money will be provided to each local authority; and if he will make a statement. [9344]

Mr. Hague: I have had the usual consultation with the Welsh Local Government Association on the local government revenue settlement and on the future distribution of mental handicap and mental illness strategy resources. I announced on 12 December the provisional standard spending assessments for local authorities in Wales. The following table shows each authority's provisional SSA and the amount included in the SSA in respect of community care and the mental handicap and mental illness strategies. In addition, each authority will receive direct grant under the mental handicap strategy in 1997–98. These grants will be announced shortly.

Local government revenue settlement 1997–98
Amounts included in the 1997–98 SSAs to allow for community care responsibilities, the mental handicap strategy and the mental illness strategy

Settlement: Provisional *All amounts in £000*

County and County Borough Councils	Total SSA	Community care	Mental handicap and mental illness strategies
Blaenau Gwent	65,375	4,240	747
Bridgend	109,937	7,241	1,361
Caerphilly	147,579	9,148	1,767
Cardiff	251,077	15,991	3,253
Carmarthenshire	152,073	11,142	1,701
Ceredigion	61,623	4,258	739
Conwy	93,113	7,326	1,071
Denbighshire	80,281	5,901	897
Flintshire	115,617	7,257	1,561
Gwynedd	109,679	7,704	1,201
Ilse of Anglesey	61,859	3,987	672
Merthyr Tydfil	56,665	3,821	594
Monmouthshire	66,144	4,540	892
Neath Port Talbot	122,454	8,909	1,418
Newport	118,887	7,356	1,410
Pembrokeshire	102,108	6,353	1,148
Powys	118,573	7,548	1,243
Rhondda Cynon Taff	210,746	15,553	2,507
Swansea	196,484	13,596	2,388
Torfaen	78,568	4,627	932
The Vale of Glamorgan	96,003	6,028	1,215
Wrexham	100,795	6,684	1,284
Total County and County Borough Councils	2,515,641	169,209	30,000

Treatment Centres

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairmen of the Welsh health authorities concerning the future of the treatment centres at Rhydlafar, Cardiff and Bridgend. [9342]

Mr. Hague: None. Health authorities, NHS trusts, GPs, community health councils and the centres themselves, were recently consulted by my Department on the future of the treatment centre initiative. The initiative will now continue in 1997–98 as originally planned.

Welsh Language

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects his Department to have its Welsh language scheme approved by the Welsh Language Board and in place. [9703]

Mr. Hague: The Welsh Office's Welsh language scheme was approved by the Welsh Language Board on the 29 November 1996 and will be operational from 13 January 1997. The scheme specifies the measures my Department has taken and will be taking to give effect to the principle established by the Welsh Language Act 1993 that, in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice in Wales, the English and Welsh languages should be treated on a basis of equality. Printed copies of the scheme will be placed in the libraries in due course.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Court Proceedings (Juveniles)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Pigot report and other matters relating to the treatment of juveniles in court proceedings. [7625]

Mr. Maclean: The advisory group on video evidence, chaired by Judge Thomas Pigot QC, made a number of recommendations in its 1989 report on the treatment of child witnesses—and other witnesses—in criminal trials. The majority of these recommendations have been implemented.

The Criminal Justice Act 1991 provided, in respect of sexual offences and offences involving violence or cruelty, for pre-trial video recordings to be used as a child's evidence-in-chief at court; for a prohibition on the defendant cross-examining a child witness in person; and for trials involving child witnesses to be transferred direct to the Crown Court without the need for a magistrates court to consider the case. The Act also provided that a child's evidence in criminal proceedings should be given unsworn; abolished the presumption that children were not competent as witnesses; and raised the age limit governing a young person's eligibility to be cross-examined via a television link from under 14 to under 17. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 removed the requirement, in sexual offence cases, that the judge warn the jury about convicting on the uncorroborated evidence of the victim.

In addition to the legislative changes, the Government have issued, or contributed towards the production of, a variety of documents and guidance notes to promote ways of assisting those children who become involved in the criminal justice system as witnesses. This includes guidance to magistrates courts on the use of screens, as recommended by the Pigot report, and a memorandum of good practice on video recorded interviews with child witnesses in criminal proceedings. In addition, in January, a video, funded by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the Home Office, will be launched offering good practice advice of judges and barristers for handling cases including child witnesses. All these measures are consistent with the Government's policy of giving a high priority to the needs of victims of crime.

The measures that we have implemented are subject to review and research to test their effectiveness. The Government will continue to make further changes where we consider that they will bring improvements to the operation of the justice system.

State Opening of Parliament

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he received from the Metropolitan police concerning the question of 20 November, *Official Report*, column *621*, from the hon. Member for Newport, West on the cost of the state opening of Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [8021]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* The Metropolitan police provided a rough estimate of £286,200 for the cost of policing the state opening of Parliament. This figure was, however, not a proper costing. It did not take into account the cost of the normal duties which the officers would otherwise have undertaken; it did not include pre-event planning or post-event debriefs and it was worked out on the basis of a complete eight hour tour of duty for all staff using average manpower cost figures and a ready reckoner. It also excluded the cost of permanent Palace of Westminster staff. It was not, therefore, an accurate reflection of the additional costs to the Metropolitan police nor of the total costs which had been incurred. The extent to which Metropolitan police officers are deployed to police a public order event is an operational decision for the commissioner.

Economic Key Points

Dr. Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) who is responsible for the security of United Kingdom economic key points; [9042]

(2) what measures he has taken to ensure that the security of economic key points is maintained and improved; and if he will make a statement; [9044]

(3) if he will list the locations of economic key points within the United Kingdom; [9041]

(4) who is responsible for financing the security of economic key points; and what is the total cost; [9043]

(5) who is responsible for financing the security of (i) the national grid site in Wokingham and (ii) the chief reception sites for North sea gas; what measures are in place to ensure that the security of these sites is maintained and improved; and if he will make a statement. [9045]

Mr. Howard: Responsibility for the security of sites designated as economic key points—EKPs—including the cost of protection, rests with their owners. The Government, through the relevant Departments, promote and monitor protective measures and provide advice, guidance and support on security matters. It is not Government policy to disclose the location of EKPs or to detail their security arrangements.

Roisin McAliskey

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what reports he has received from the Director General of the Prison Service on the medical condition of Roisin McAliskey; and if he will make a statement. [8560]

(2) what representations he has received concerning the conditions under which Ms Roisin McAliskey is held; and if he will make a statement. [8559]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* Responsibility for these matters has been delegated

to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 16 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about Ms Roisin McAliskey.

Throughout her time in custody Ms McAliskey has received regular medical attention. There are no specific medical concerns at present; but, as a precaution, following her complaint of stomach pains, Ms McAliskey was taken to Greenwich District hospital for a scan and a full examination by a consultant obstetrician.

The obstetrician confirmed that Ms McAliskey was in good general health, that her 16 week pregnancy was progressing normally and there was no cause for concern. As a further precaution Ms McAliskey was returned to Holloway Prison where specialist ante-natal care is more readily available, should it become necessary.

Representations have been received from some Members of Parliament, the organisation Catholic Justice and Peace and a person claiming to be a friend of the family.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the treatment of Roisin McAliskey; what visits she has been allowed from *(a)* her mother, *(b)* other relatives and friends, *(c)* legal advisers, *(d)* Irish Teachda D'ala and *(e)* British hon. Members; and if he will make a statement. [9174]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Max Madden, dated 16 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Roisin McAliskey.

Representations have been received about the treatment of Ms McAliskey from some Members of Parliament, a local interest group and a person claiming to be a friend of the family. The Irish Embassy also enquired about a visit for her partner. This visit took place on 28 November.

Ms McAliskey was visited by her mother on 6 December. Her partner has visited her on three occasions and she has also had visits from her father, sister, and from legal representatives. One Member of Parliament has also visited Ms McAliskey.

Prisoners (Drug Dependency)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library copies of the most recent guidelines issued by him concerning the treatment of drug dependent prisoners in prison; and how many guidelines, or amendments to guidelines, have been issued since 1990. [9163]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Max Madden, dated 16 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about guidelines concerning the treatment of drug dependent prisoners.

There are three documents two of which are already in the Library: "Caring for drug users", issued in April 1991 and the current Prison Service Drugs Strategy, "Drug misuse in prison", issued in April last year. In the same month we also published Health Care Standard 8, "Clinical Services for Substance Misusers." I enclose a copy for your information, and I am arranging for a complete set of Health Care Standards to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the total number of drug dependent prisoners currently detained in prisons in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [9200]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Max Madden, dated 16 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about estimates of the number of drug dependent prisoners.

Drug misuse is a covert activity which makes data on prevalence difficult to obtain and interpret. We do not have definitive information about the scale of drug misuse in prisons; but it is a significant problem. The matter has been the subject of some independent research. For example, a recent study (Maden et al 1995) of 995 males, male youths and females remanded in custody in England and Wales showed that upon psychiatric examination 26% had a harmful or dependant misuse of substances (adult males 23 %, male youths 23% and women 33%). These figures do not include alcohol or cannabis.

When these subjects were questioned about their drug use prior to entering prison 32% had used cannabis, 14% had used opiates, 9% had used prescribed benzodiaezepines, 7% had used illicit benzodiazepines, 8% had used crack cocaine, 6% had used amphetamines and 2% had used cocaine.

A previous study by the same researchers of 1751 sentenced male prisoners in England and Wales (1991) showed that before entering prison 43% had used cannabis, 9% had used opiates, 9% had used amphetamines and 5% had used cocaine.

A major new source of information has also recently become available. Since April 1996 all English and Welsh prisons have introduced mandatory random drug testing. One important result from this development is that for the first time we are routinely assembling a database of the level and nature of drug use in our prisons. Eventually this will allow us to understand more, to follow trends, to manage and target our resources more effectively for tackling drug problems—and in time to be able to measure the impact of our policies.

Prisons (Standing Orders)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the current prison standing orders which apply to prisons in England and Wales; and which public officials are denied access to prisons for inspection purposes under those standing orders. [9166]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Max Madden, dated 16 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about whether a copy of prison standing orders will be placed in the library of the House, and which public officials are denied access to prisons for inspection purposes under those standing orders.

Copies of the current standing orders have already been placed in the library of the House. There is nothing in those orders which deny access to public officials who duties legitimately necessitate visiting a prison for the purposes of inspection.

Patrick Christopher Lynch

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when an application by Patrick Christopher Lynch detained at HMP Parkhurst to be repatriated to the Republic of Ireland was received; when the application was referred to the appropriate authorities in the Republic; what response has been received; when he expects a decision to be made; and if he will make a statement. [9175]

Miss Widdecombe: A request for repatriation to the Republic of Ireland, made by Christopher Lynch, was received at Prison Service headquarters on 17 April 1996. Requests are decided only after consideration of all relevant information by the two states concerned. An initial decision on whether to refer Mr. Lynch's repatriation request to the appropriate authorities in the Republic of Ireland will be made once all the relevant information requested has been received and considered.

Prisoners (Needle Sharing)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reports he has received, in each of the last three years, and the current year to date, about the extent of needle sharing between HIV positive and other prisoners in prisons in England and Wales. [9167]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Max Madden, dated 16 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about reports received in each of the last three years and the current year to date, about the extent of needle sharing between HIV positive and other prisoners in prisons in England and Wales.

There have been no reports of incidents of needle sharing between HIV prisoners and other prisoners in prisons in England and Wales during the current year or the previous three years.

Prison Medical Service

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the expenditure on the prison medical service for the current year; what is the projected expenditure over each of the next three years; and what proportion of such expenditure is devoted to the costs of drug treatment. [9169]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Max Madden, dated 16 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking what is the expenditure on the Prison Medical Service for the current year; what is the projected expenditure over each of the next three years; and what proportion of such expenditure is devoted to the costs of drug treatment.

The delivery of the health care to prisoners in accordance with set standards has been devolved to prison establishments. Governors must therefore allocated appropriate resources from within their establishment budgets. For this reason it is not possible centrally to differentiate health care staff cost from the overall Prison Service budget, nor forecast precise future expenditure.

The expenditure for specialist services and medical suppliers is however known, and for the last financial year is set out in the attached table.

Health care expenditure 1995–96

	£ million
Locums	4.15
Dentist	1.90
Opticians	0.47
Psychiatrists	1.44
Medical/pharmacy supplies	4.45
Total	12.42

For drug treatment and testing initiatives, the following money was secured from the 1995 Public Expenditure Survey.

£ million

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1990–00*
Testing	4,880	6,090	7,340	7,340
Treatment	5,440	5,571	5,710	5,710
Total	10,320	11,661	13,050	13,050

These monies are in addition to that already being spent by prisons on existing rehabilitation programmes.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons Dr. Rosemary Wool's appointment as chief medical officer of the prison medical service ended; when Dr. Wool left the service; and if he will make a statement. [9204]

Mr. Howard: Dr. Wool was due to retire on her 60th birthday, the normal retirement age for Home Office employees. As arrangements to find a successor had not been completed by then, Dr. Wool was granted an eight month extension of service and retired on 31 March 1996. A permanent successor has yet to be appointed and the post is currently filled on a temporary basis.

Prisoners (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning the denial of *(a)* compassionate leave and *(b)* normal parole facilities to prisoners detained in Northern Ireland on temporary transfer. [9170]

Miss Widdecombe: Representations are received occasionally from various sources, including prisoners, legal representatives, hon. Members, Members of the European Parliament and the public, about applications from prisoners for compassionate temporary release and parole. Some of these concern prisoners temporarily transferred to prisons in Northern Ireland.

Bradford Riots (Inquiry Evidence)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the evidence submitted by an official in his Department to the Bradford commission inquiring into matters in the aftermath of the Bradford riots. [9178]

Mr. Kirkhope: Yes. A copy has now been placed in the Library.

Category A Women Prisoners

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many category A women are in: *(a)* Holloway and *(b)* Belmarsh prisons (i) on remand and (ii) after conviction; and how many ae pregnant. [9273]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 16 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about Category A women in Holloway and Belmarsh prisons.

On 12 December 1996 there were three Category A women in Holloway prison and none in Belmarsh prison. Of those in Holloway prison two were convicted and one unconvicted. The unconvicted prisoner is known to be pregnant.

Category A Remandees

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many category A remandees have subsequently been granted bail before court hearings during the last five years. [9275]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 16 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of category A prisoners who have subsequently been granted bail before court hearings during the last five years.

The information requested is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Telephone Tapping

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many office telephone taps have been authorised by chief constables in each of the constabularies in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement; [8858]

(2) what is his policy in respect of decisions by chief constables to tap the office telephones of senior employees of police authorities. [8857]

Mr. Howard: The interception of a communication in the course of its transmission by a public telecommunications system requires a warrant issued by the Secretary of State under the Interception of Communications Act 1985. A decision by a chief constable to monitor calls on a private telephone system operated by the police is not covered by the 1985 Act; such a decision is an operational matter for the chief constable concerned. There is no central record of such authorisations and the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for The Home Department, what notification he received of the decision of the chief constable of Merseyside to tap the office telephone of Ms Alison Halford when employed by the Merseyside Police Authority; and if he will make a statement. [8856]

Mr. Howard: It is not the practice of the Government to confirm or deny allegations that interception has taken place in any particular case. Any decision by a chief constable to monitor calls on a private telecommunications system operated by the police is an operational matter which would not require notification to the Home Office.

Ms Alison Halford

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the Government Departments and public bodies involved in the proceedings relating to Ms Alison Halford before the European Commission and European Court of Human Rights, indicating the rank and names of the officials who will attend the court hearing in Strasbourg; and if he will make a statement. [8863]

Mr. Howard: The Departments involved are the Home Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It has not yet been decided which officials will attend the hearing in Strasbourg.

Seat Belts

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* drivers and *(b)* passengers have been prosecuted for not wearing seat belts in the (i) front seats and (ii) back seats of vehicles in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [8206]

(2) how many *(a)* drivers and *(b)* passengers have been prosecuted for not wearing seat belts in the (i) front seats and (ii) back seats of vehicles in Wales in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [8207]

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 13 December, *Official Report*, column *404*.

European Union

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the cost in the last 12 months of sending Ministers and officials to meetings in Brussels and elsewhere in Europe in connection with his Department's handling of EU business. [4947]

Mr. Howard: I have placed a note in the Library setting out the readily available information, which relates to the cost of attending such meetings over the period April to October 1996. Statistics for the last 12 months couldbeobtainedonlyatdisproportionatecost.

Television Licences

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women

registers of these interests are maintained and regularly updated. The registers are checked by officials before members are included in the consideration of any case.

Orimulsion

Mr. Rogers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the potential environmental impact of the burning of orimulsion in power stations; and if he will make a statement. [8527]

Mr. Page: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is currently considering an application for consent to extend a power station in order to enable it to burn orimulsion. Environmental information has been submitted as part of that application and objections received to the proposal but no conclusions have yet been reached in relation to the application.

National Fibre Optic Network

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to ensure the United Kingdom has a national fibre optic network; and if he will make a statement. [7606]

Mr. Taylor: The provision of a stable regulatory environment has successfully encouraged the growth of competition in both telecommunications services and infrastructure. This has led to substantial investment in the sector, including rapid growth of optical fibre networks in the UK, to produce a network of seamlessly interconnecting networks. Prices have fallen by 40 per cent. in real terms, quality increased, and number of household covered risen to 93 per cent.

Within the cable sector alone, investment is running at more than £2.5 billion a year, and some 45 per cent. of homes in the country already have the possibility of connection to cable operators.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Azad Kashmir (Prisoners)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the introduction of new laws by the Government of Azad Kashmir enabling prisoners to apply for bail if detained for up to two years without trial; how many prisoners have been granted bail under these laws; and if he will make a statement. [9203]

Dr. Liam Fox: Since we have not received such reports, we have asked our high commission in Islamabad to obtain details. I shall arrange to pass these to the hon. Member.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement concerning the current circumstances of Ghazanfer Ali recently granted bail after being detained in Mirpur prison; and if he will make a statement. [9279]

Dr. Fox: We understand that Gazanfer Ali, who is a Pakistani national, was released from Mirpur prison on bail on 30 November and that he was due to appear in court on 7 December.

Sri Lanka Citizen (Medical Treatment)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will permit Sudarga de Silva, of Sri Lanka, to visit the United Kingdom to receive private medical treatment. [9134]

Dr. Liam Fox: It is policy on grounds of confidentiality for Ministers not to comment publicly on individual applications for entry clearance. I will therefore write separately to the hon. Member.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Treaties (Ponsonby Rule)

Sir Roger Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to be able to provide explanatory memoranda with treaties which are laid under the Ponsonby rule. [9430]

Dr. Liam Fox: We accept that explanatory memoranda can usefully supplement the established Ponsonby procedures by bringing to the attention of Parliament the main features of the treaties with which they are laid. In future therefore every international agreement laid under the Ponsonby rule will be accompanied by an explanatory memorandum. This new procedure will apply to all international agreements signed after 1 January 1997 which are laid under the Pensonby rule, namely those agreements which are concluded subject to ratification, accession, acceptance or approval, and which are laid for a period of 21 sitting days after signature and before ratification or its equivalent.

Arrangements will be made to lay copies of the note for Departments entitled "Guidelines on Explanatory Memoranda for Treaties" in the Libraries of both House.

We should like to thank Lord Lester of Herne Hill, whose initiative led directly to the introduction of the new arrangements.

Ghana

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the recent presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana. [8912]

Dr. Liam Fox: Our assessment is that these elections were free, fair and transparent. The Commonwealth and EU observers have issued statements indicating that they share this assessment. I am placing these in the Library of the House. I understand that other international observers have reached similar conclusions. We congratulate the Ghanaian people on this reaffirmation on democratic values.

DEFENCE

Gulf War

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* soldiers, *(b)* sailors, *(c)* Air Force personnel and *(d)* medical personnel who were mobilised for Operation Granby in the Gulf war (1) served in (i) Saudi Arabia, (ii) Kuwait and (iii) Iraq and (2) were held in reserve at other locations. [9283]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member.

Expenditure

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of gross domestic product was spent on defence by *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* France and *(c)* the United States of America in the last year for which figures are available. [9011]

Mr. Soames: The information requested, for calendar year 1995, is as follows:

(a) United Kingdom 3.1 per cent.

(b) France 3.1 per cent.

(c) United States 3.9 per cent.

Future Offensive Air System

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on the future offensive air system for the Royal Air Force. [9704]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Ministry of Defence has decided to carry out a feasibility study into a future offensive air system. The Tornado GR1—now being upgraded to GR4 standard—provides a long-range power projection and air interdiction capability. The study will examine a range of options for maintaining this capability beyond the planned withdrawal date of the GR4 in the second decade of the new millennium.

Study contracts to the value of £35 million are expected to be placed in the new year. Options to be examined include variants of the Eurofighter and other new design and off-the-shelf combat aircraft; unmanned air vehicles; and stand-off air-to-ground missiles launched from transport aircraft. Collaborative options will be pursued.

Industrial Tribunals

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many industrial tribunals have considered cases brought against his Department in each of the last 10 years. [8791]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Information in the form requested is not held centrally, but at least 32 industrial tribunals in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have considered cases brought by civilian or service personnel against the Ministry of Defence.

Premature Voluntary Release

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people have applied for premature voluntary release in each of the services in each of the last five years. [8792]

Mr. Soames: The number of service personnel who have applied for premature voluntary release in each of the last five years are as follows:

	RN		*Army*		*RAF*	
	Officers	*Ratings*	*Officers*	*ORs*	*Officers*	*ORs*
1991–92	141	2,140	424	9,525	207	1,834
1992–93	56	1,667	221	6,810	163	1,241
1993–94	84	1,396	226	5,628	126	1,149
1994–95	121	1,691	358	6,499	167	1,456
1995–96	161	2,639	384	5,591	223	2,149

British Aerospace Companies

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he intends to take to support the Society of British Aerospace Companies' foresight action initiative. [9309]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The foresight action initiative proposed by the Society of British Aerospace Companies—SBAC—contains a number of very interesting projects, the aims of which are firmly supported by the MOD. My officials are now awaiting detailed submissions from SBAC before evaluating the potential of these projects and the scope for incorporation into MOD plans.

Bowman Project

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Bowman project. [9316]

Mr. Arbuthnot: Bowman is a new combat radio system which will replace the Clansman family of radios. Work on the project definition stage of the programme is largely complete and equipment is being tested in field trials, which are due to end in May 1997. The MOD is currently examining the procurement options open to the Department for production, to determine the most cost-effective way forward. A decision on the way ahead will be taken as soon as possible.

TREASURY

Unemployment Benefits (York)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many new claims for unemployment-related benefits have been made by people living in the York travel-to-work area since April 1992; and how many people living in the York travel-to-work area have made one or more new claims for unemployment-related benefits in the same period. [8532]

Mrs Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

	Average price £/tonne				
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995[1]
1st earlies	104.88	64.47	93.87	171.65	113.18
Ware	78.48	73.28	57.96	130.81	206.79
Seed	107.93	102.17	78.12	129.78	145.41

[1] Provisional.

Detailed price figures are also published by and may be obtained from the Potato Marketing Board.

Dounreay

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what notification his Department received from the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority in respect of the fires in the D9833 wet silo at Dounreay; and what investigations have been conducted by the Scottish Environmental Protection agency. [8674]

Mr. Kynoch: Notification of incidents of this nature would be made by the authority to the nuclear installations inspectorate. Nevertheless, reports by HM industrial pollution inspectorate covering the period April 1988 to March 1996 refer to an incident in 1992 when a small fire occurred in a radioactive waste store as a result of the reaction of traces of sodium metal with moisture. The fire was quickly brought under control and extinguished. Monitoring undertaken in the vicinity at the time indicated no radioactive material had been released.

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency was established on 1 April 1996. It has received no notification of any fires in the wet storage facility. The agency will continue to monitor closely operations at the site.

Student Grants

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number and percentage of students in Scotland who received Scottish Education Department grants in 1990. [9082]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 13 December 1996]:* In academic year 1990–91 70,742 students held awards from the Scottish Education Department. This represented 97.8 per cent. of the Scottish domiciled students undertaking full-time courses of higher education in Scotland.

Student Loans

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the cost to public funds of student loans in Scotland in each year since their introduction. [9081]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 13 December 1996]:* Expenditure by the Scottish Office on student loans, in each year since their introduction in academic year 1990–91, is as follows:

Financial year	Net total £
1990–91	8,005,194
1991–92	16,486,843
1992–93	24,446,864
1993–94	36,904,818
1994–95	56,589,238
1995–96	78,321,353
1996–97[1]	111,714,000
	332,372,310

[1] Estimated.

Fishery Protection Orders

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list each protection order currently in place under the Freshwater and Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1976; and if he will make a statement; [8968]

(2) if he will list each amendment made to the River Tay protection order in each year since 1986; and if he will make a statement. [9039]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The following protection orders have been made under the Freshwater and Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Act 1976:-

The Rivers Tweed and Eye Protection Order 1980;
The Upper Spey and Associated Waters Protection Order 1982;
The River Lunan Catchment Area Protection Order 1983;
The River Tummel Catchment Area Protection Order 1983
The River Tay Catchment Area Protection Order 1986;
The West Strathclyde Protection Order 1988;
The River Earn Catchment Area Protection Order 1990;
The River Don Catchment Area (Part) Protection Order 1990;
The Loch Morar and River Morar Protection Order 1992;
The Loch Awe and Associated Waters Protection Order 1992;
The River Clyde Catchment Area (Part) Protection Order 1994;
The North West Sutherland Protection Order 1994;
The River Arkaig, Loch Arkaig and Associated Waters Protection Order 1995.

I have renewed the River Tay Protection Order in 1990 and 1993 to ensure its continuance. The order was varied earlier this year so that it now runs without limit of time. All other protection orders which previously required renewal have been varied in the same way.

Prisoners (Drug Dependency)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of drug dependent prisoners currently detained in prisons in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [9202]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mr. Max Madden, dated 16 December 1996:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of drug dependent prisoners currently detained in prisons in Scotland.

Drug misuse is an illegal activity which makes it difficult to obtain data on the number of prisoners *dependent* on drugs. Information is not collected centrally on the number of prisoners being treated by prison medical officers for drug dependence. A number of studies have produced data on the proportion of prisoners who misuse drugs, based on information provided anonymously by prisoners. In the 1994 Prison Survey 45% of

prisoners claimed to have used drugs at least once in the previous six months in prison (cannabis 40%, temgesic 22%, heroin 9%, other drugs 15%—some had used more than one drug). The injecting of drugs, however, might be a more useful measure of drug dependence. In the 1994 Prison Survey, 5% (191) of prisoners who responded said they had injected drugs during the previous six months in prison (heroin 4%, temgesic 3%, other drugs 2%—some had used more than one drug). In 2 studies this year, prisoners were asked if they had injected drugs at some time prior to imprisonment. In HMP Low Moss 113 out of 293 prisoners who responded had done so, while in HMP Aberdeen 53 out of 157 prisoners who responded had done so.

Mandatory drug testing, which is being phased in across the Scottish Prison Service, will eventually provide accurate and objective information on the scale and trends of drug misuse. It complements the measures already in the SPS drugs strategy. That includes searching and surveillance to minimise the amount of drugs getting into prisons, closed circuit TV at visits, the use of sniffer dogs and a range of other measures. It also complements the constructive work that is being done in the context of reduction and detoxification. There are drug treatment programmes in 7 prisons, with more planned, and a new abstinence unit was opened at Low Moss prison earlier this year. Prisoners receive a comprehensive information and training programme on HIV, AIDS and drugs within 2 week of admission to prison. All prisons provide education and counselling. Extensive links have been established with community-based drug agencies to provide throughcare and continuing support for prisoners on release. Taken together all these measures represent a major commitment to reduce the drugs problem.

Feudal Superiors

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will bring forward proposals to widen the remit of the Lands Tribunal for Scotland to cover all claims of unreasonable and oppressive behaviour by feudal superiors under feudal law. [4822]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 27 November 1996]:* The present remit of the Lands Tribunal already allows it to vary or discharge land obligations which have become unreasonable or inappropriate, those which are unduly burdensome compared with any benefit resulting or which would result from performance of the obligation and those which impede some reasonable use of the land. I do not therefore propose to consider amendments to its remit until the Scottish Law Commission's proposals on a new system of land tenure to replace the present feudal system are available.

Stone of Destiny

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what costs were incurred by his Department in respect of *(a)* transport, *(b)* security and *(c)* ceremonial functions in connection with the return of the Stone of Destiny. [7715]

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 5 December 1996]:* The costs incurred in relation to the return of the Stone of Destiny are still being collated.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the total costs of the events at *(a)* Coldstream and *(b)* Edinburgh of the ceremonies involved in the return of the Stone of Destiny to Scotland; and from what budgets the costs are being met. [7922]

Mr. Forsyth *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* The costs incurred in relation to the return of the Stone of Destiny are still being collated.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

34. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the Law Society's proposals for the reform of legal aid with special reference to the control of the legal aid budget. [7632]

Mr. Streeter: All the proposals contained in the Law Society's paper, "Better Value Better Justice", have been carefully considered. Where possible, we are assessing and taking forward these proposals in consultation with the Law Society and other interested parties.

35. **Sir Ivan Lawrence:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of recent representations to his Department about proposals for the reform of legal aid. [7633]

Mr. Streeter: I frequently receive representations on this matter from professional bodies and associations, pressure groups, advice services, individual lawyers, and members of the public. I have been encouraged by the response to date and look forward to further discussions and consultation as the reforms progress.

37. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what new proposals he has to reduce the costs of legal aid with particular reference to solicitor's fees. [7635]

Mr. Streeter: The Government's long-term plans for legal aid are set out in the White Paper, "Striking the Balance" (Cm 3305 HMSO). In the short term, I propose to introduce standard fees for advocates in all civil cases and for litigators conducting family and domestic violence cases. Standard fees will provide a better means of controlling expenditure than hourly based payment systems, whilst at the same time providing a quicker more certain remuneration system for lawyers.

Land Registry

36. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what investigations he is conducting into the operations of the Land Registry. [7634]

Mr. Streeter: None. However, the Lord Chancellor's Department's relationship with HM Land Registry is one of close and regular liaison. The Department regularly monitors the performance of the Land Registry against targets set by the Lord Chancellor.

Private Finance Initiative

39. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement about progress with the PFI for new magistrates courts buildings. [7637]

Mr. Streeter: The pathfinder PFI project to provide managed court accommodation to meet the requirements of the Hereford and Worcester magistrates courts committee is proceeding on programme. Expressions of interest from prospective providers are at present being evaluated. A letter has been sent to all local authorities and MCCs informing them of my decision to allow a further four projects to go forward during the coming financial year. These projects are Derbyshire, Humberside, Manchester and Merseyside—Liverpool, Sefton, St. Helens, Knowsley, and Wirral.

Census Returns (Public Access)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to secure continuing public access to the census returns following the closure of the Public Record Office, Chancery lane. [7636]

Mr. Streeter: Public access to the census returns at the Public Record Office, Chancery lane is expected to continue until 7 March 1997. From 10 March 1997, public access will be provided at the new family records centre at Myddelton place, Myddleton street, London, EC1.

Magistrates Courts (Wales)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates courts there were in Wales in 1978–79; and how many are currently operating. [7626]

Mr. Streeter: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 14 October 1996, *Official Report*, column *655*.

That is, that there are at present 63 magistrates courts in Wales and that no accurate record exists for the number of courts in Wales in 1978.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Employment (Belfast, West)

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many new jobs have been created in the constituency of Belfast, West since 31 August 1994. [5124]

Mr. Ancram: Net employment growth figures are not available at constituency level for the period requested. Although not a direct indicator of job growth, unemployment fell from 8,531 in August 1994 to 6,072 in October 1996.

Publicity

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what promotional and public information campaigns his Department is *(a)* currently running and *(b)* planning to run during the next six months; and for each campaign (i) how much it will cost, (1) in total and (2) to his Department, (ii) what agencies or bodies are undertaking the work and (iii) what is its planned duration. [7409]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is provided in the table:

(A) Current promotional/public information campaigns

Campaign	*Total cost (£000)*	*Cost to department (£000)*	*Who is carrying out promotion*	*Duration*
Promotion of innovation and research and development	275	275	Industrial Research and Technology Unit	Ongoing
Promotion of NI as a business location in US, Germany, GB, Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong	3,667	3,667	Industrial Development Board	Ongoing
Campaign to promote the launch and use of the NCVQ Belfast field office	17.5	17.5	Training and Employment Agency, National Council for Vocational Qualifications	September 1996 to March 1997
Contribution to the UK campaign to promote the Disability Discrimination Act 1995	50	50	Training and Employment Agency, Employers' Forum on Disability	October 1996 to March 1997
Revaluation of non-domestic properties	[1]78	78	Anderson Group Holdings (NI) Ltd.	October 1996 to January 1997
Crime prevention public awareness	[2]—	[2]—	McCann Erickson, Advertising Consultants	April 1996 to March 1997
NSS organ donor register	8.5	8.5	Department of Health and Social Services	One year from 29 October 1996
Healthy eating campaign 1996 (fibre promotion)	21	21	Health Promotion Agency	January to December 1996
Immunisation	27	27	Health Promotion Agency	19 November 1996
Sexual health campaign (convenience advertising)	38	38	Health Promotion Agency	April 1996 to March 1997
World Aids Day 1996	5	5	Health Promotion Agency	1 December 1996
Contraception education service	20	20	Health Promotion Agency	April 1996 to March 1997
Historic monuments campaign to attract visitors	5	5	Environment Heritage Service	April to December 1996
Driver licensing—information leaflet to promote road safety and freedom of movement throughout the EC	1.1	1.1	Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency NI	Ongoing—leaflet sent to each applicant for a provisional driving licence
Anti-drink/drive campaign	135	135	Department of the Environment NI	4 December 1996 to 5 January 1997
Driver Testing—Information to promote road safety and freedom of movement throughout the EC	5	5	Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency NI	December 1996 (One month)

[1] Includes costs not attributable to agency carrying out the work.

[2] Cost of campaign has not been disclosed on grounds of commercial confidentiality.

(B) Campaigns planned to run during the next six months

Campaign	*Total cost (£000)*	*Cost to department (£000)*	*Who is carrying out promotion*	*Duration*
No Smoking day 1997	14	14	Health Promotion Agency	12 March 1997
Health Eating Campaign 1997 (promotion on eating less fat)	9	9	Health Promotion Agency	January to December 1997
Drugs campaign	192	192	Health Promotion Agency	January to March 1997
Seat belts radio campaign	6	6	Department of the Environment NI	Three weeks in February 1997
Information leaflets on complaints procedures for tenants of registered housing associations	2.5	2.5	Department of the Environment NIOne day in March 1997	
Information on new housing regulations relating to assured tenancies	0.5	0.5	Department of the Environment NI	One day between January and March 1997
Anti-speeding TV and radio campaign	64	64	Department of the Environment NI	One month April/May 1997
Housing benefit promotion	2	2	Rate Collection Agency	Six weeks February/March 1997
Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency awareness campaign	0.25	0.25	Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency	One day between January/March 1997

Christmas Expenditure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much his Department plans to spend on celebrating Christmas and the new year. [7578]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* The Northern Ireland Departments plan to spend £31,267 for the Christmas and new year festivities.

Within the Northern Ireland Office, there are a number of functions being hosted by my right hon. and learned Friend, ministerial colleagues and the office. The estimated costs are about £9,200. The cost of Christmas cards, including postage, is estimated at £2,250.

Life Sentence Prisoners

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* loyalist and *(b)* republican life sentence prisoners are currently conforming with prison regulations and have received release dates. [8722]

Sir John Wheeler: There are currently 12 loyalist and four republican life sentence prisoners with provisional release dates. Provisional in this context means that a prisoner is required satisfactorily to complete a pre-release programme lasting normally around nine months before the Secretary of State will decide whether to release the individual on life licence. Life sentence prisoners are released within 15 days of the Secretary of State's having signed the life licence.

Prisoners are not categorised into various groupings. However, the definitions requested in the question are recorded for purely management purposes and reflect the prisoners' perceived affiliations.

None of the 16 prisoners with a provisional date for release have had the date varied or withdrawn because of a breach of prison regulations.

Action for Community Employment Scheme

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many *(a)* 18 to 25-year-olds and *(b)* 25 to 60-year-olds long-term unemployed people have participated in the ACE scheme (i) in the current year and (ii) in each of the previous five years; [8709]

(2) how many participants in the ACE scheme are working part-time; and what is the average number of hours per week they work; [8710]

(3) how many people are currently participating in *(a)* jobskills, *(b)* the ACE training scheme and *(c)* the community work programme; and how many places are available; [8711]

(4) what was the average wage of an ACE participant *(a)* in the present year and *(b)* in each of the previous five years; [8712]

(5) how many *(a)* people aged 40 years or above, *(b)* men, *(c)* women, *(d)* married men, *(e)* married women and *(f)* people aged 18 to 25 years have taken part in the ACE scheme in each of the last five years including the current year; and how many participants there were in total. [8714]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Ms Majorie Mowlam, dated 16 December 1996:

Parliamentary Questions Nos. 2027, 2028, 2029, 2030 and 2032

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency (T&EA), to reply to your questions about the Action for Community Employment (ACE) scheme, Jobskills and the Community Work Programme (CWP).

Parliamentary Question 2027 (Ref: 8709)

The ACE scheme is targeted at the long term unemployed in the 18–64 year old age group. I regret that I am unable to provide you with a detailed breakdown of the two age groupings requested. The information is not readily available and could not be provided other than at a wholly disproportionate cost.

Parliamentary Question 2028 (Ref: 8710)

On 27 September 1996, the latest date for which comprehensive information is available, there was 2510 part-time participants on the ACE scheme.

The information you requested regarding the average number of hours worked by part-time workers is not available. Part-time workers are employed by sponsoring organisations and the T&EA does not collect information on average hours worked from them. However, sponsoring organisations are required to employ part-time workers for a minimum of 16 hours and maximum of 30 hours per week.

Parliamentary Question 2079 (Ref: 8711)

The number of participants on the dates indicated is as follows:

A. Jobskills—at 8 November 1996: Training for 16,881 young people and adults is supported through the Jobskills programme, with a further 2,606 trainees similarly supported in the Agency's own Training Centres. All 16 and 17 year olds are guaranteed a training place but adult training numbers were capped when Jobskills reached full capacity in September 1996.

B. ACE—at 29 November 1996: 8040 places were available of which 7228 were filled;

C. CWEP—at 6 December 1996: 1190 places were available of which 1020 were filled.

Parliamentary Question 2030 (Ref: 8713)

The T&EA does not record information on the actual wage rates paid to ACE employees. Sponsoring organisations are paid £93 per week for each ACE worker employed. Of this up to £11 can be used to defray overhead expenses. The balance must be used as a contribution towards paying the local rate for the job being undertaken by the ACE employee. Any shortfall between Agency's funding and the local rate is met by the sponsors pay well in excess of the shortfall.

Parliamentary Question 2032 (Ref: 8714)

Much of the information you are seeking is not readily available and could only be provided immediately at a disproportionate cost. The following information is available:

Year	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
1996	3,700	4,005	7,705
1995	5,117	5,027	10,144
1994	4,894	4,582	9,476
1993	n/a	n/a	9,690

Information in respect of 1992 and 1991 is not available.

I am sorry I am unable to be more helpful in reply to some of your questions but I hope you find the information I have supplied useful.

Cattle Cull

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements have been made in Northern Ireland for the payment of compensation for the slaughter of young bulls aged between 24 and 30 months. [9583]

Mr. Ancram: A scheme was introduced to allow the eligible animals to be slaughtered. Parliamentary approval for this new service will be sought in a spring supplementary estimate for the Northern Ireland agriculture, fisheries and forestry services and support vote, class 1 vote 2. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure totalling £3.25 million has been met by the way of a repayable advance from the contingency fund.

Trials (Delays)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what further progress has been made to reduce delays in coming to trial in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [9582]

Sir Patrick Mayhew: Hon. Members will know that a system of administrative time limits has been operating since 1992, aimed at reducing the time defendants spend in custody awaiting trial on indictment.

On 7 December last year, in another place, my noble Friend Baroness Denton in reply to a question from Lord Hylton, *Official Report House of Lords*, column 87, set out the results of the scheme's first three years. She also announced that the scheme would continue until at least 30 June 1996 and that from 1 November 1995 the overall target for cases to move from first remand to arraignment would be reduced from 11 months to 10 months.

I can now report on the scheme's first four years up to 30 June 1996. Over this period, 80 per cent. of defendants in custody awaiting trial for scheduled offences were arraigned within the set target. Over the past year, the average time to process such defendants has been maintained at 37 weeks. Ninety-five per cent. of non-scheduled defendants in custody also met the target, the average time again being maintained at 29 weeks. The latter is a particularly commendable achievement in the light of a substantial increase over the past year in the proportion of non-scheduled cases.

Worthwhile improvements have also been recorded in the period between arraignment and start of trial. Comparing 1993 with performance over the past year, the average wait for scheduled defendants has fallen from 28 weeks to 11 weeks and for non-scheduled defendants from 11 weeks to nine weeks.

The criminal justice agencies' efforts remain effective, whilst they also continue to explore other means of streamlining and accelerating procedures. In highlighting their effective progress in the operation of the scheme, I have decided to extend it until at least the end of June 1997.

Travelling Community Sites

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are currently living at the travelling community site *(a)* on the Glen road and *(b)* at the Monagh bypass, in Belfast, West. [8891]

Mr. Moss: I am informed by Belfast city council, which has responsibility for the provision of sites for travellers, that the number of people currently living at the travellers' community sites *(a)* on the Glen road and *(b)* at the Monagh bypass, in Belfast, West are:

	Number of people
(a) Glen road	227
(b) Monagh bypass	74

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the planned completion date of the Monagh woods site for the travelling community, in Belfast, West. [8892]

Mr. Moss: The provision of accommodation sites for travellers in Belfast is a matter for Belfast city council. I understand that Belfast city council is carrying out an economic appraisal of the various options available to provide accommodation for the travellers currently on the Monagh bypass site.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many children *(a)* under 11 and *(b)* under 16 years, are currently living in the travelling community sites (i) on the Glen road and (ii) at the Monagh bypass. [8893]

Mr. Moss: I am informed by Belfast city council, which has responsibility for the provision of sites for travellers, that the number of children *(a)* under 11 and *(b)* under 16 years of age currently living at the travellers' community sites (i) on the Glen road and (ii) at the Monagh bypass are:

	(a) Under 11	*(b) Under 16 (including under 11s*
(a) Glen road	86	112
(b) Monagh by-pass	21	40

Race Relations Order

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he plans to lay the draft race relations order for Northern Ireland before Parliament. [8894]

Mr. Ancram: It is my intention to lay this draft order before Parliament at the earliest possible date.

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what provisions relating to the availability of living space for members of the travelling community in the district council areas will be included in the proposed draft race relations order. [8895]

Mr. Ancram: There are no specific provisions in the draft legislation relating to this matter.

Public Expenditure Allocations

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list Northern Ireland Office expenditure for the years 1997–98 and 1998–99 broken down into the same categories as in his answer of 10 December, *Official Report*, column *130*, to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) showing, for each category, the corresponding figures and the percentage real terms change from the projections published in his answer of 11 December 1995, *Official Report*, columns *538–39*, to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). [9015]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is as follows:

£ million

	Figures announced 11 December 1995		*Figures announced 10 December 1996*		*Percentage change*[1] [2]	
	1997–98	*1998–99*[3]	*1997–98*	*1998–99*[3]	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Northern Ireland Office						
Law, order, protective and miscellaneous services[4]	858	850	934	920	4.7	3.6
Northern Ireland Departments						
Northern Ireland agriculture and forestry services and support	149	140	148	130	–0.7	–7.1
Industry, trade, energy and employment	539	530	550	530	2	0
Roads and transport	174	180	172	170	–1.1	–5.6
Housing	267	270	243	240	–9	–11.1
Environmental and miscellaneious services	252	220	226	190	–10.3	–13.6
Law, order and protective services (fire service)	44	40	44	40	0	0.0
Education, arts and libraries[5]	1,431	1,430	1,376	1,380	–0.8	–0.7
Health and personal social services	1,623	1,630	1,642	1,670	1.2	2.5
Social Security administraton	158	160	158	160	0	0
Other public services	60	60	59	60	–1.7	0
NI block (excluding social security benefits[6])	5,536	5,510	5,553	5,500	0.1	–0.2
Social security benefits	2,479	2,590	2,494	2,590	0.6	0
NI Block[6]	8,035	8,100	8,046	8,090	0.2	–0.1
National agriculture and fisheries support	172	170	175	170	1.9	0
NI programme[6]	8,207	8,270	8,222	8,260	0.3	–0.1

[1] Since the comparisons are based on changes between 11 December 1995 and 10 December 1996 in the plans relating to 1997–98 and 1998–99, the cash and real terms percentage changes are the same.

[2] The 1997–98 changes are based on figures rounded to the nearest £1 million to ensure like for like comparisons with the figures published on 10 December 1996: 1998–99 changes are based on figures rounded to the nearest £10 million and comparisons need to be treated with greater caution.

[3] Rounded to nearest £10 million.

[4] For the purpose of like for like comparisons, the law and order percentage changes are adjusted for the technical adjustment to the PANI grant for accruing superannuation liability which was made in the 1996 survey.

[5] For the purpose of like for like comparisons, education, arts and libraries percentages are adjusted to exclude the effect of Northern Ireland's share of student loan debt sale receipts allocated in the 1996 survey.

[6] The overall block and programme percentage changes are adjusted to exlude the effects of the accruing superannuation liability and the student loan debt sale recipts.

Melbourne Declaration on Injury

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if his Department has signed the Melbourne declaration on injury prevention and control, adopted on 22 February. [8643]

Mr. Moss *[holding reply 6 December 1996]:* The Melbourne declaration does not provide for formal endorsement by Government of its conclusions. Prevention of accidents and trauma is a key area in the Department of Health and Social Services' regional strategy for Northern Ireland. The Department of the

Environment for Northern Ireland, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and the Department of Health and Social Services also published a strategy in July 1995 to reduce fatal and serious road traffic accident casualties.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance Contributions

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 19 November, *Official Report*, columns *591–21*, on national insurance, how many employees paid (i) at and (ii) below the maximum national insurance contribution rates; and what was the total estimated employed population in each year from 1979–80 and 1995–96. [7933]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the tables.

Number of people who paid Class 1 national insurance contributions in each relevant year (Great Britain)

000

	Earnings equal to or above the Upper Earnings Limit (UEL)	*Earnings below the UEL*
1979–80	997	22,004
1980–81	931	21,313
1981–82	877	20,361
1982–83	888	19,932
1983–84	927	19,830
1984–85	1,020	19,855
1985–86	1,088	20,104
1986–87	1,102	20,315
1987–88	1,294	20,679
1988–89	1,603	20,930
1989–90	1,747	21,113
1990–91	1,831	21,005
1991–92	1,707	20,364
1992–93	1,833	19,791
1993–94	1,802	19,710
1994–95	1,855	19,782

Source:
Lifetime Labour Market Database, a 1 per cent. sample of national insurance records taken at February 1996.
Notes:
1. Data relates to whole tax years and includes people who were employed and paid contributions for any part of the year.
2. Figures exclude women paying Reduced Rate Contracted-out National Insurance contributions, as they information is not available.

Total estimated employed population—(Great Britain)

000

	Employees
1979–80	[1]—
1980–81	21,405
1981–82	[1]—
1982–83	20,288
1983–84	20,515
1984–85	20,746
1985–86	20,852
1986–87	20,892
1987–88	21,601
1988–89	22,167
1989–90	22,388
1990–91	22,034

Total estimated employed population—(Great Britain)

000

	Employees
1991–92	21,520
1992–93	21,313
1993–94	21,415
1994–95	21,675

Source:
Labour Force Survey historical supplement 1996.
Notes:
[1] Figures for 1979 and 1981 are not available as the source survey was biennial prior to 1982.
1. Figures taken in March of each tax year, and as such are point in time figures. They are not seasonally adjusted.

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 21 November, *Official Report*, columns *597–8*, what is his estimate, at 1995–96 prices and if present contribution rates continued to apply, of the gross value of national insurance contributions for *(a)* the employed, *(b)* the self-employed, *(c)* employers, *(d)* class 1A for cars and car fuel and *(e)* the total of *(a)* to *(d)*, before deducting NHS charges or allowing for occupational and personal pension rebates, for the years (i) 2000–01, (ii) 2010–11, (iii) 2020–21, (iv) 2030–31, and (v) 1995–96. [8252]

Mr. Heald: The information is as follows:

Great Britain (1995–96 prices)

£ billion

	1995–96	*2000–01*	*2010–11*	*2020–21*	*2030–31*
Employees	21.00	25.65	29.40	31.65	32.30
Self-employed	1.45	1.65	1.90	2.05	2.10
Employers Class 1 NICs	27.65	34.65	42.30	49.25	55.05
Employers Class 1A NICs	0.50	0.50	0.60	0.70	0.80
Total	50.60	62.45	74.20	83.70	90.25

Source:
Government Actuary's Department
Notes:
1. Components may not sum to total due to rounding.

Child Support Appeal Tribunals

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeals which have been lodged with a child support appeal tribunal are currently pending; what is the average length of time between the lodging of an appeal to a child support appeal tribunal and its hearing; and in how many cases the child support officer's decision has been upheld. [8793]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: At the end of November 1996, there were 4,227 appeals pending with a child support appeal tribunal of which 524 had already been listed for a future session. The average length of time between lodgement and first hearing was 26 weeks. During November, 466 cases were determined: in 84 cases the child support officer's decision was upheld.

War Pensions

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many new claims were made in the last

available year for war pensioner's mobility supplement; and how many of these were *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful. [9338]

Mr. Heald: In the 12 months ending September 1996, the last period for which figures are available, there were 3,351 claims made in respect of war pensioner's mobility supplement. During the same period 4,435 decisions on claims for the supplement were made, of which 2,619 resulted in awards. The decisions made in any one period may not necessarily relate to the claims made during the same period.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals currently receive the war pensioner's mobility supplement; what is the average amount paid per recipient; and what is the total amount paid each year as a percentage of total social security expenditure. [9337]

Mr. Heald: As at 30 September 1996, the last date for which figures are available, 23,602 war pensioners were receiving mobility supplement. The current amount payable is a flat rate of £37.75 weekly. Expenditure on mobility supplement is estimated at £45 million in 1996–97. This amounts to 0.05 per cent. of total social security expenditure.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the expected savings from the proposed changes to war pensions *(a)* in total and *(b)* for each proposed change, indicating the percentage of total social security expenditure in each case. [9335]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Programme savings (£ million cash prices)

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*[1]
War pensions mobility supplement 40 per cent. disablement gateway	1 (0.001 per cent.)	3 (0.003 per cent.)	4
Allowance for lowered standard 40 per cent. disablement gateway Unemployability supplement 80 per cent. disablement gateway Unemployability supplement no claims from over age 65	1 (0.001 per cent.) combined for all four options	3 (0.003 per cent.)	5
Widows rent allowance - no new claims		negligible saving	
Cease reminders to return claim forms	2 (0.002 per cent.)	3 (0.003 per cent.)	4
No copy decisions to third parties		not costed	
Abandon long-term assessment (LTA)	0	0	0
Require evidence to justify review	+ neg.	0.5 (neg per cent.)	1
Backdating—new rules	3 (0.003 per cent.)	3 (0.003 per cent.)	3
Align payment start dates		negligible cost	
Automatic War Widows Pension for 80 per cent. and Unemployability supplement cases. War Widows pension	–1 (0.001 per cent.)	–1 (0.001 per cent.	1
restoration for cohabitees		negligible cost	
Abolition of gratuities on remarriage/ cohabitation		not yet costed	
Clothing allowance one rate (the higher)	0.5 (neg per cent.	0.5 (neg per cent.)	–0.5
Funeral grants for 80 per cent. and Unemployability supplement cases		negligible cost	
Remove rank differentials for gratuities	–0.5 (neg per cent.	–0.5 (neg per cent.)	–0.5
Total	5 (0.006 per cent.)	10 (0.012 per cent.	15

[1] Expenditure figures are not available for 1999–2000.

1. Negligible = Less than £250,000.
2. All amounts are rounded to the nearest 0.001 per cent.
3. Figures may not sum due to rounding.
4. A minus sign indicates a cost.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many recipients of war disablement pension failed to apply for a pension increase in the five most recent years for which figures are available; and how many increased awards were paid to recipients of war disablement pensions in each of those years. [9331]

Mr. Heald: A war disablement pension may be increased for a range of reasons; for example; as a result of uprating of age changes which are made automatically or because the pensioner's service-related disablement has increased. In the latter case, the war pensioner may ask the Secretary of State to review his assessment of the degree of disablement. Information on the number of war pensioners whose disablement has increased but who have not required such a review is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Information in the table shows the number of awards increased following request for a review.

1991–92: 13,699
1992–93: 13,196
1993–94: 14,204
1994–95: 18,576
1995–96: 14,514

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of war veterans who would cease to be entitled to the war pensioner's mobility supplement if the 20 per cent. disability threshold for entitlement were raised to 40 per cent. [9333]

Mr. Heald: It is estimated that, annually, 800 war pensioners with disablement assessments below 40 per cent. would no longer qualify.

No one already in receipt of mobility supplement at the point of the proposed change would be affected.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of war veterans who would cease to be entitled to the unemployability supplement if the 20 per cent. disability threshold were raised to 80 per cent. [9332]

Mr. Heald: It is estimated that about 400 new claims for unemployability supplement would not succeed if the threshold for disablement were raised to 80 per cent. No war pensioner currently receiving the allowance would be affected.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many new claims for war pensions were made in the last available year by *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged over 65 years. [9334]

Mr. Heald: In the period October 1995 to 30 September 1996, a total of 27,215 new claims for war disablement pension were made. The number of claims made by men and women aged over 65 is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many reminder notices for returning forms claiming pension increases were issued to war pensioners in each of the last five years. [9330]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if there will be a waiver of the seven-year rule for unconditional claiming of war pensions following discharge in the case of Gulf war veterans whose entitlements will not be determined until the conclusion of the studies he has commissioned into Gulf war illnesses; and if he will make a statement. [9173]

Mr. Heald: No. Such a waiver is unnecessary. Anyone who considers that disablement may be due to service in the Gulf may claim a war pension at any time. Where a claim is made within seven years of termination of service there is no onus on the claimant to show that disablement is due to service. Even where a claim is made more than seven years after termination of service, it is only necessary for there to be reliable evidence to create a reasonable doubt that disablement might be due to or aggravated by service. The benefit of that reasonable doubt is always given to the claimant.

The Secretary of State may review a decision to reject a claim at any time and on any ground. Where a claim made within seven years of termination of service is later reviewed the same conditions which applied at the time the claim was made apply to the review.

State Pensions

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will recalculate the figures in table 6, para 7.12 of "Options for Equality in State Pension Age" *(a)* on the basis of current prices and *(b)* on the assumption that an individual reverted to the full basic state pension at 70 years of age. [9162]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the tables:

Table 6, paragraph 7.12 of options for equality in state pension age: recalculated on the basis of 1996–97 benefit rates

Basic pension available at different ages 1996–97 prices	*Age 63 "pivot"*[1]	*Age 65 "pivot"*[1]
60	49	42
61	53	45
62	56	48
63	61	53
64	66	56
65	72	61
66	77	66
67	84	72
68	92	79
69	101	86
70	110	95

Table 6, paragraph 7.12 of options for equality in state pension age: recalculated on the basis of 1996–97 benefit rates assuming pension increases to full basic pension at age 70 for those retiring before the pivot

Basic pension available at different ages	Age 63 "pivot"[1]	Age 65 "pivot"[1]
60	40	27
61	45	31
62	52	35
63	61	41
64	66	49
65	72	61
66	77	66
67	84	72
68	92	79
69	101	86
70	110	95

Note:
In the second table, it has been assumed that where someone retired before the pivot age then their reduced pension will be increased to the full basic rate when they get to 70. For those that retire after the pivot age, and thus receive a higher initial pension, it has been assumed that this higher rate of pension will continue to be paid after age 70.
[1] Pounds per week at 1996–97 prices.
Source:
Government Actuary's Department.

Disability Allowance

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received regarding recent changes in disability allowance; and if he will list the organisations concerned. [9307]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The information is not yet available in the format requested. However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a number of representations. The organisations which have written since the beginning of October are: Mencap, Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland, Disabled Drivers Association, the Society for the Mentally Handicapped, the Patients Council, the Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults, the Robert Ferguson Unit and Escape.

I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible with the outstanding information.

Mr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have had their disability allowance *(a)* reduced and *(b)* discontinued since the introduction of the benefit. [9305]

Mr. Mitchell: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table. Information on attendance allowance, industrial injuries disablement benefit, the pneumoconiosis,

byssinosis and miscellaneous diseases benefit scheme, the workmen's compensation supplementation scheme and war disablement pensions is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Disability living allowance awards reduced and discontinued—6 April 1992 to 30 November 1996

	Numbers (thousands)
Award reduced[1]	51
Benefit discontinued[2]	450

Source:

Analytical services division.

Notes:

[1] Awards reduced relate to decisions made on renewal claims, reviews and appeals.

[2] Includes termination of award due to death, no renewal of award and other reasons e.g. disallowances.

Hearing Loss

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent medical evidence has been evaluated by his Department in respect of the link between hearing loss and military service; and if he will publish the evidence. [9336]

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) on 12 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *360*.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in *(a)* hospitals and *(b)* community homes in the NHS have had their mobility allowance withdrawn or reduced since the introduction of the benefit. [9306]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Prior to the changes to legislation governing payment of the mobility component of disability living allowance to people in hospital, the mobility component was not affected by admittance to hospital or similar institutions.

Some 7,000 people were affected by the withdrawal of mobility component of disability living allowance when the changes were introduced on 31 July. It is not possible to identify separately those in hospital and similar institutions.

Information regarding the numbers subsequently affected by withdrawal of the mobility component is not yet available.

War Widows' Rent Allowance

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list *(a)* the number of widows who currently receive the war widows' rent allowance, *(b)* the average amount paid per recipient and *(c)* the total amount paid in each of the last five years as a percentage of total social security expenditure; [9339]

(2) how many new claims were made in the last available year for the war widows' rent allowance, indicating the number of these that were *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful. [9340]

Mr. Heald: As at 30 September 1996, the last date for which figures are available, 1,060 widows were in receipt of rent allowance. The current maximum amount payable is £30 a week. The average amount paid per recipient is estimated at £23 per week. During the period January 1996 to September 1996, the only period for which figures are available, 491 new claims were received. During the same period, 447 decisions were made, of which 50 resulted in awards. The decisions made in any one period may not necessarily relate to the claims made during the same period.

The total amount paid by way of rent allowance over the last five years is not available. Expenditure for 1996–97 is estimated at about £1 million. This is 0.0014 per cent. of total social security expenditure.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 17 December 1996

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

"New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans"

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what costs quoted in the document, "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans", were prepared in his Department; what detailed assumptions and interpretations were provided to officials in his Department to enable preparation of each cost; and what was the total cost to public funds of preparing each estimate. [6343]

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer December 2 1996]:* The Department for Education and Employment, in conjunction with the Treasury, prepared factual material relating to costings published in "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" numbered 32 to 53. The detailed assumptions and interpretations that were provided to officials are set out in my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary's reply to the hon. Member today. It is not normal working practice to keep a record of the time spent in providing factual information to Ministers and it is not therefore possible to offer a reliable estimate of the costs involved.

Motivation and Achievement

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State of Education and Employment when she plans to establish the national advisory group on improving motivation and tackling under-achievement. [8841]

Mr. Paice: I regard the establishment of the advisory group as an essential first step in the development of the relaunch strategy, because I want to harness the expert advice of all our partners. I expect the group to hold its first meeting early in 1997.

National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment she has made of the findings of the study "The Assessment of NVQs" by the University of Sussex institute of education. [8897]

Mr. Paice: The author of the report, Professor Eraut, accepted the invitation of the National Council for Vocational Qualification to address its NVQ policy committee on 5 December to discuss his report. The council will take those findings into account when revising the requirements for NVQs. The research raised important questions about the difficulties of assessment in NVQs, particularly when it occurs away from the job, but it also showed that very few practitioners wanted to go back to the old patterns of training and assessment.

Stammering

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will provide financial support for the distribution of the British Stammering Association teachers' video pack to schools nationwide. [8913]

Mrs. Gillan: The Department made a major contribution to the costs of producing the video. We have assisted the British Stammering Association with the distribution of copies to local education authorities. We shall be advertising the video in "Schools Update", a departmental publication which goes to every school in England.

Teachers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will make a statement on the timetable and consultation procedure on proposals to modify the arrangements for meeting the pension costs of early retirement for teachers in maintained and in independent schools. [9303]

Mrs. Gillan: The proposals were issued for consultation on 22 October 1996, with a closing date for responses of 17 January 1997. My right hon. Friend will take final decisions after that date.

Mr. Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will estimate the increase in contingent liabilities for trustees of schools administered by charities following the proposed modification of funding arrangements for early retirement pensions for teachers. [9304]

Mrs. Gillan: My right hon. Friend does not expect there to be an increase in contingent liabilities following the proposed reforms of premature retirement arrangements for teachers. Independent schools make their own decisions on premature retirement. The ongoing pension costs they will incur for premature retirements granted after 1 April 1997 will be liabilities, but they will not be contingent.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) which local education authorities in the current year are budgeted to spend at or below the education standard spending assessment level; [9186]

(2) if she will list the local education authorities that have budgeted to spend over their education standard spending assessment level in the current financial year, indicating the percentage of excess expenditure planned in each case. [9185]

Mr. Robin Squire: The following table shows each local education authority's education standard spending assessment and education budget for 1996–97, and the percentage difference.

Education SSAs and budgets 1996–97

LEA	*1996–97 SSA £ million*	*1996–97 Budget £ million*	*1996–97 Difference Per cent.*
City of London	0.759	3.085	306.6
Kensington and Chelsea	34.193	48.214	41.0
Westminster	58.134	72.585	24.9

are currently held in prison in connection with charges or convictions relating to non-payment of the television licence. [7760]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Denis MacShane, dated 13 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many men and women are currently held in prison in connection with charges or convictions relating to non-payment of the television licence.

Provisional information for 31 October 1996, the latest date for which figures are available, is that three males and no females were held in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales in connection with non-payment of television licences

Airguns

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many airguns are currently licensed. [7046]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 2 December 1996]:* Higher-powered air weapons require a firearm certificate issued by the police. Information about how many are licensed is not recorded centrally and is not distinguished from other firearms in the total figure. Such information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Paediatric Intensive Care Beds

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 20 November, *Official Report*, column *596*, on paediatric intensive care beds, how many of the additional beds *(a)* are scheduled to open this year, *(b)* will open shortly, giving the timetable and location and *(c)* are now available, indicating their location. [6670]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 28 November 1996]:* The report "Paediatric Intensive Care" (May 1996), copies of which are available in the Library, described plans to open 23 additional designated paediatric intensive care beds and seven high dependency beds in 1996–97. The current position is as shown in the table.

Location	*Additional beds now open (November 1996)*		*Additional beds planned to open 1996–97*	
	PIC	*HD*	*PIC*	*HD*
Trent	2	1	2 March	—
North Thames	1	—	1 December 1 January	—
North West	3	4	—	—
South and West	5	—	—	—
Anglia and Oxford	2	3	—	—
West Midlands	2	—	1 January	—
Northern and Yorkshire	3	—	1 January	2 January
South Thames	2	—	2 by April	—
Total	20	8	8	2

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will announce changes in the membership of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. [9680]

Mr. Horam: Further to my announcement on 7 November at columns *623–25*, when I said that a further announcement would be made on one additional appointment to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, I am pleased to announce that the following has been appointed as a member:

> Dr. Joan Kathleen Stringer, principal of Queen Margaret college, Edinburgh, and member of the Scottish standing committee of the national committee of inquiry into higher education.

This appointment, in common with those announced previously, was made in accordance with guidance issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments following the first report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life—the Nolan Report Cm 2850–1, May 1995.

Junior Doctors' Hours

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress the Government are making in their target of reducing to 56 by 31 December the number of hours worked weekly by junior doctors. [8804]

Mr. Malone: Steady progress is being made in reaching the ceiling of 56 hours average weekly working hours for junior doctors. This target is contained in the "New Deal on Junior Doctors' Hours", copies of which area available in the Library. At 30 September 1996 regional task forces reported that 22,221 junior doctors, or 78.4 per cent. of all juniors, were complying in full with all the new deal hours limits, including the 56-hour ceiling.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals his Department has made to alter the target of 56 hours to be worked weekly by junior doctors by 31 December. [8805]

Mr. Malone: I have no proposals to change the target of 56 hours maximum average weekly hours of work contained in the "New Deal on Junior Doctors' Hours", copies of which are available in the Library. I have made it clear that the Government have a strong commitment to action to bring all junior doctors within this ceiling.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of the recent NHS executive internal report on junior doctors' hours. [8807]

Mr. Malone: No. The report concerned is an internal discussion paper and as such is covered by exemption 2 part II of the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Internal Advice)".

Tuberculosis, Scurvy and Rickets

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of *(a)* tuberculosis, *(b)* scurvy and *(c)* rickets were reported (i) nationally and (ii) in each region in each year region in each year since 1980. [8806]

Mr. Horam: The numbers of notifications of tuberculosis to the Office for National Statistics for 1980 and provisional figures for 1995 are given in the table. Figures for the intervening years are given by standard

region in table 5 of the annual publications "Series MB2 Communicable Disease Statistics", copies of which are available in the Library. Changes in the methods for recording numbers of notifications mean that total notification figures for 1980 and 1981 include cases of chemoprophylaxis but from 1982 totals excludes chemoprophylaxis are given. Cases of tuberculosis chemoprophylaxis are not cases of actual tuberculosis and most are therefore not notified. There was 458 cases of chemoprophylaxis in 1995.

TB notifications

Standard region	*1980 (including chemoprophylaxis)*	*Provisional figures for 1995 (excluding chemoprophylaxis)*
North	486	194
Yorkshire and Humberside	884	597
East Midlands	625	413
East Anglia	146	80
South East	3,767	2,656
South West	355	202
West Midlands	1,164	654
North West	1,325	630
Wales	390	180
England and Wales[1]	9,142	5,606

[1] Excluding Port Health Authorities.

Data are not collected centrally on scurvy or rickets. National diet and nutrition surveys since 1980 do not show any evidence of the vitamin C deficiency which causes scurvy in the general population. There are occasional reports of rickets in young children, caused by vitamin D deficiency from insufficient exposure to sunlight. The Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy has established an expert sub-group on the nutritional aspects of bone health which is considering this.

Practice Nurses (Pensions)

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) for what reasons practice nurses have not been allowed to transfer their contributions from the NHS pension fund to practice pension schemes; [8964]

(2) for what reasons no explanation was given to practice nurses in respect of requirements made of them to remove their pensions from the NHS pension fund and to take out private pensions; [8966]

(3) how many practice nurses have been advised to take out private pensions to date; [8962]

(4) what factors underlay his decision to remove practice nurses from the NHS pension fund; [8963]

(5) how many practice nurses came out of the NHS pension fund in *(a)* 1989, *(b)* 1990 and *(c)* 1991; [8965]

(6) when he last had discussions with the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Nurses about the removal of practice nurses' pensions from the NHS pension fund to private pension schemes. [8967]

Mr. Malone: There will be an announcement shortly on entry of general practitioner practice staff including practice nurses to the national health service pension scheme.

Genetically Engineered Soya

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to protect public health regarding the increased use of imported soya which has been genetically engineered; and if he will make a statement. [8959]

Mr. Horam: Ministers are advised on the safety of foods and ingredients obtained from genetically modified—GM—organisms by an independent committee of experts, the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes. The ACNFP assessed the imported GM soya beans developed by Monsanto in 1994 and concluded that they were toxicologically and nutritionally equivalent to, and therefore as safe as, conventional soya beans.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many cases of E.coli infection have been reported in east Lancashire since 1 December;[9223]

(2) what assessment he has made of the source of the E.coli infection in east Lancashire. [9222]

Mr. Horam: E.coli infection has been isolated in clinical samples from 12 individuals, including one outside the area who has been linked to this outbreak. Of these, nine have been or are ill, but all are recovering. The outbreak is being investigated locally by a control team, which comprises medical, scientific and environmental health experts. Officials in the Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are closely monitoring the progress of the local team and the action taken. Detailed epidemiological and microbiological investigations are continuing and precautionary measures have been taken to ensure that public health in the locality is not jeopardised.

Social Services White Paper

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations he *(a)* has had and *(b)* proposes to have with local authorities about his forthcoming White Paper on social services, with reference to the first paragraph of part D of the guidelines on central-local relations. [9317]

Mr. Burns: We expect to meet leaders of the social services authorities to discuss the proposed White Paper early in the new year.

SCOTLAND

Potato Prices

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he collates about the current levels of potato prices; and if he will list the prices for the current year and each of the past five years. [8346]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Information about average wholesale market prices is collected for statistical purposes and published annually in the "Economics Report on Scottish Agriculture" by the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department and these are as follows for each of the last five years. Current year (1996) provisional figures should be amiable in February 1997.

Education SSAs and budgets 1996–97

LEA	1996–97 SSA £ million	1996–97 Budget £ million	1996–97 Difference Per cent.
Bristol	119.870	140.36	17.1
North Lincolnshire	56.381	65.589	16.3
Hammersmith and Fulham	56.047	64.419	14.9
Bath and North-east Somerset	54.404	62.446	14.8
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	99.652	112.479	12.9
North Somerset	58.642	65.949	12.5
Hackney	92.084	102.717	11.5
South Gloucestershire	78.677	87.726	11.5
East Riding	102.954	114.234	11.0
Bury	61.635	68.308	10.8
Gateshead	70.844	78.423	10.7
St. Helens	66.604	73.701	10.7
Coventry	119.872	132.425	10.5
Harrow	72.990	80.432	10.2
Salford	82.496	90.705	10.0
Leeds	252.509	277.521	9.9
Lambeth	100.826	110.569	9.7
Isles of Scilly	1.233	1.348	9.3
Wolverhampton	99.898	109.18	9.3
Solihull	73.069	79.732	9.1
Kirklees	141.523	153.676	8.6
Haringey	93.427	101.424	8.6
Richmond-upon-Thames	45.854	49.779	8.6
Sandwell	118.096	128.118	8.5
Croydon	118.396	128.375	8.4
Norfolk	243.384	263.296	8.2
Barnet	117.029	126.56	8.1
Tower Hamlets	122.839	132.482	7.8
Dudley	104.158	112.232	7.8
Lincolnshire	213.026	228.873	7.4
Stockport	89.804	96.405	7.4
Oldham	94.759	101.526	7.1
Wigan	110.133	117.974	7.1
Barking and Dagenham	69.879	74.848	7.1
North Yorkshire	185.854	198.947	7.0
Cumbria	170.602	182.085	6.7
Camden	78.312	83.467	6.6
Walsall	108.588	115.647	6.5
Wandsworth	86.304	91.601	6.1
Lancashire	510.448	541.678	6.1
Cheshire	348.970	369.25	5.8
Birmingham	448.721	474.736	5.8
Sefton	106.847	113.041	5.8
Trafford	76.735	80.994	5.6
Suffolk	217.470	229.341	5.5
Derbyshire	319.922	335.955	5.0
Bolton	100.891	105.938	5.0
Wiltshire	197.517	207.308	5.0
Somerset	150.908	158.312	4.9
East Sussex	219.761	230.305	4.8
North Tyneside	68.757	72.034	4.8
Nottinghamshire	365.135	382.423	4.7
Northumberland	113.513	118.872	4.7
Surrey	307.474	321.961	4.7
Hampshire	525.153	548.077	4.4
Warwickshire	164.025	170.672	4.1
Leicestershire	333.840	345.657	3.5
Lewisham	108.942	112.709	3.5
Southwark	109.297	113.071	3.5
Kingston-on-Hull	102.701	106.112	3.3
Isle of Wight	45.138	46.618	3.3
Greenwich	114.263	117.975	3.2
Cambridgeshire	237.278	244.971	3.2
Shropshire	145.332	149.995	3.2
Ealing	112.151	115.671	3.1
Wakefield	111.605	115.098	3.1
Durham	216.644	223.37	3.1
Islington	81.095	83.6	3.1
Kingston-upon-Thames	47.066	48.482	3.0
York	52.793	54.249	2.8
Enfield	117.827	121.052	2.7
Hertfordshire	387.245	397.772	2.7
Tameside	80.591	82.671	2.6
Staffordshire	366.019	375.302	2.5
Rochdale	82.736	84.829	2.5

Education SSAs and budgets 1996–97

LEA	1996–97 SSA £ million	1996–97 Budget £ million	1996–97 Difference Per cent.
West Sussex	235.410	241.273	2.5
Calderdale	77.167	78.992	2.4
Bromley	103.845	106.244	2.3
Northamptonshire	222.270	227.12	2.2
Dorset	207.427	211.929	2.2
South Tyneside	59.030	60.301	2.2
Merton	58.096	59.309	2.1
Waltham Forest	97.421	99.416	2.0
Sutton	67.782	69.116	2.0
Doncaster	119.680	121.6	1.6
Oxfordshire	192.571	195.19	1.4
Essex	566.981	573.518	1.2
Liverpool	209.232	211.492	1.1
Redbridge	98.258	99.055	0.8
Kent	581.733	584.829	0.5
Gloucestershire	183.797	184.761	0.5
Buckinghamshire	252.855	254.076	0.5
Wirral	132.298	132.773	0.4
Devon	345.862	346.134	0.1
Cornwall	164.930	164.914	0.0
Hereford and Worcester	229.005	228.907	0.0
Bedfordshire	220.156	219.921	–0.1
Hartlepool	37.013	36.944	–0.2
Rotherham	102.425	102.173	–0.2
Havering	87.183	86.864	–0.4
Hillingdon	93.797	93.427	–0.4
Sheffield	170.970	170.18	–0.5
Knowsley	73.138	72.785	–0.5
Manchester	188.261	186.917	–0.7
Hounslow	94.807	94.071	–0.8
Middlesbrough	61.491	60.996	–0.8
Stockton-on-Tees	71.747	71.094	–0.9
Sunderland	114.863	113.582	–1.1
Barnsley	76.867	75.887	–1.3
Bradford	209.868	205.955	–1.9
Redcar and Cleveland	59.590	58.348	–2.1
North-east Lincolnshire	64.840	63.069	–2.7
Berkshire	282.308	274.143	–2.9
Bexley	88.646	85.177	–3.9
Brent	109.692	103.504	–5.6
Newham	130.381	121.028	–7.2
Total	17,764.2	18,476.577	4.0

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will use the introduction of mandatory baseline assessment to provide effective screening for children at risk of literacy and numeracy difficulties. [9496]

Mrs. Gillan: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Sir J. Hannam) on 3 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *611*.

Schools (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how she plans to monitor ethnic minority achievement through the national curriculum. [8811]

Mrs. Gillan: As I announced on 5 September, we propose to use the baseline statistics on the ethnic composition of each school, which we will be collecting through the annual schools census, as a basis for considering ways of monitoring ethnic minority pupils' progress through national curriculum assessment. We aim to consult on these in due course.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if she will list the new arrangements for collecting baseline statistics on the ethnic composition of schools; [8812]

(2) when she plans to introduce the collection of baseline statistics on the ethnic composition of schools. [8813]

Mrs. Gillan: We included two new questions in the 1996 schools census covering (i) the total number of minority ethnic pupils, and (ii) the total number of pupils for whom English is a second language, in each school. For the 1997 schools census, we will include a more detailed count of the number of pupils in each ethnic group for the school as a whole, and a separate count, in secondary schools only, of the number of pupils aged 15 in each ethnic group at the start of the academic year.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the School Curriculum Assessment Authority and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications will report their recommendations on how best to introduce ethnic monitoring for post-16 qualifications. [8814]

Mrs. Gillan: Current plans are that SCAA and NCVQ will provide advice to Ministers on the data collection recommendations in Sir Ron Dearing's report on 16 to 19 qualifications by May 1997.

Legislation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many items of legislation relating to her Department have been repealed since January 1994; how many statutory instruments were introduced during the same period; and how many of the latter were *(a)* deregulatory and *(b)* fee orders. [9373]

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

Personal Services Industry

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will place in the Library a copy of the existing guidance, covering the acceptance of job advertisements by jobcentres; if the jobs on offer require the applicant to work as a model, or in *(a)* a sauna bath, *(b)* a massage parlour, *(c)* an escort agency and *(d)* a kissogram agency. [9613]

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service Agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Ian McCartney, dated 17 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to write to you about your request that the Employment Service's existing guidance covering vacancies for employment as a model, in a sauna bath, a massage parlour, an escort agency or a kissogram agency be placed in the Library. This falls within my responsibility as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The information requested is contained in the Guide to Job Broking volume 1 and I am arranging for a copy to be placed in the Library. The relevant instructions are contained in chapter 3, paragraphs 186 to 202.

In the light of recent events the Secretary of State has asked for this present guidance to be reviewed. This work is in hand and, subject to legal advice, should shortly be available. I will arrange for the new guidance to be sent to you and to be placed in the Library.

I hope this is helpful.

Schools (Performance)

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when assessment she has made of the relative performance of grant-maintained and local authority schools. [9786]

Mr. Forth: The 1996 school performance tables show that 50 per cent. of pupils in grant-maintained schools achieved five or more good GCSE passes, compared with 41 per cent. of pupils in LEA schools. There was almost no difference in the performance of pupils in selective schools in the two sectors, but 46 per cent. of pupils in GM comprehensive schools achieved five or more good GCSE passes compared with 40 per cent. in LEA schools. Analysis of the GCSE performance tables from 1992 to 1996 shows that GM schools have made rather more progress than comparable LEA schools in raising standards year on year. In the 1996 national curriculum assessments for 7, 11 and 14-year-olds, a higher proportion of pupils in GM schools reached or exceeded the expected levels of performance at each key stage. Details are set out in the following tables:

Table 1: Percentage of 15-year-old pupils achieving graded GCSE results in 1996

	Grades (per cent.)	*Grades (per cent.)*	*Grades (per cent.)*
1A: all schools			
GCSE passes	5+ A*–C	5+ A*–G	1+ A–G
LEA schools	40.6 per cent.	87.1 per cent.	93.4 per cent.
GM schools	50.1 per cent.	91.1 per cent.	95.3 per cent.
1B: comprehensive schools only			
GCSE passes	5+ A*–C	5+ A*–G	1+ A–G
LEA comprehensives	40.0 per cent.	87.0 per cent.	93.3 per cent.
GM comprehensives	46.4 per cent.	91.1 per cent.	95.6 per cent.

Table 2: time series comparison of LEA maintained schools with schools which became grant-maintained on or before 1 September 1992

		Percentage of pupils achieving 5+ A–C GCSEs in 1992	*Percentage of pupils achieving 5+ A*–C GCSEs in 1996*	*Percentage point increase 1996 over 1992*
LEA maintained schools	Selective	89.2	93.4	4.2
	Non-selective	32.2	38.3	6.1
GM schools	Selective	89.3	94.6	5.3
	Non-selective	37.5	45.6	8.1

Table 3: Percentage of seven-year-old pupils achieving national curriculum level 2 and above

Key stage 1	*English*		*Mathematics*		*Science*	
	TA	*Test*	*TA*	*Test*	*TA*	*Test*
LEA schools	79	—	82	82	84	—
Reading	78	78				
Writing	76	80				

Table 3: Percentage of seven-year-old pupils achieving national curriculum level 2 and above

Key stage 1	*English*		*Mathematics*		*Science*	
	[1]TA	*[1]Test*	*TA*	*Test*	*TA*	*Test*
Speaking and listening	82					
GM schools	85	—	86	87	88	—
Reading	84	84				
Writing	82	85				
Speaking and listening	85	—				

Note:
[1] TA = teacher assessment, Test = national test.

Table 4: Percentage of 11-year-old pupils achieving national curriculum level 4 and above

Key stage 2	*English*		*Mathematics*		*Science*	
	TA	*Test*	*TA*	*Test*	*TA*	*Test*
LEA schools	60	57	60	54	65	62
GM schools	64	63	65	60	69	68

Table 5: Percentage of 14-year-old pupils achieving national curriculum level 5 and above

Key stage 3	*English*		*Mathematics*		*Science*	
	TA	*Test*	*TA*	*Test*	*TA*	*Test*
LEA schools	60	56	61	56	59	55
GM schools	68	65	69	65	68	65

Work Accidents (Cost)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate she has made of the cost to the economy of accidents at work in each year since 1990; and if she will make a statement. [9442]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

The Health and Safety Executive estimates that the total cost to the economy of work accidents, including preventable damage-only accidents, and work-related ill health was between £6 billion and £12 billion in 1990.

The next updating of these costs by the Health and Safety Executive will be in 1998. The updating will cover costs for 1995–96, on which the necessary data will be compiled from the Labour Force Survey.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which projects that the Building Research Establishment is currently undertaking will cease on privatisation. [9391]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have been asked to reply.

I do not anticipate that any projects will cease as a result of privatisation.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Belize

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy that no British funds or loans will be disbursed for the paving of the Belize southern highway until the necessary social and environmental safeguards for the protection of the rainforest and the Maya peoples of Toledo district are in place. [9509]

Dr. Liam Fox: Our appraisal of the Belize southern highway project will take fully into account the social and environmental impact of paving the road before a decision is made on Britain's financial contribution.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tea Room

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee (1) what was the total number of supervisors and managers responsible for the supervision of services provided by the House of Commons Tea Room in each year from 1990 to 1995; [9020]

(2) what was the total wage bill of the kitchen and counter staff in the House of Commons Tea Room in each year from 1990 to 1995; [9024]

(3) how many management and supervisory staff are planned to be responsible for the House of Commons Tea Room when all facilities are fully operational; [9028]

(4) how many counter and kitchen staff were in attendance over a full working week in the House of Commons Tea Room in each year from 1990 to 1995; [9018]

(5) how many House of Commons Tea Room staff have had their working hours reduced in the past six months; [9026]

(6) what was the total number of hours worked by counter and kitchen staff in the House of Commons Tea Room in each year from 1990 to 1995; [9019]

(7) how many counter and kitchen staff are planned to be in attendance over a full working week in the House of Commons Tea Room when all facilities are operational. [9027]

Sir Colin Shepherd: These are matters for the Director of Catering Services. I have asked her to write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what consultations took place with hon. Members prior to introducing the most recent changes in the House of Commons Tea Room. [9022]

Sir Colin Shepherd: Between 3 March and 5 May 1993, as part of its inquiry into refreshment services for the House of Commons, the Catering Committee took formal oral evidence from the hon. Members for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle), for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) and for Burnley (Mr. Pike), on behalf of the parliamentary Labour party, from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and from the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). The evidence from these hon. Members included comments on the Members' Tea Room.

Written submissions, dealing in part with the Members' Tea Room, were also received from the hon. Members for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant).

These submissions were received in response to a notice inserted in the "All Party Notices," inviting comments from all hon. Members on the various aspects of the proposed refurbishment of Refreshment Department outlets and premises.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee if he will place in the Library copies of the consultation documents relating to organisational changes in the Tea Room. [9023]

Sir Colin Shepherd: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the First Report from the Catering Committee, Session (1993–94), HC (1993–94) 75–I and –II, which includes relevant documentation.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what was the total capital cost of those changes to the House of Commons Tea Room introduced in 1996. [9021]

Sir Colin Shepherd: The refurbishment of the Tea Room was carried out in conjunction with the construction of the new Terrace cafeteria kitchen, which also serves the Tea Room. It is not, therefore, possible to allocate the costs of the various elements of the project meaningfully between the two areas.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what estimate he has made of the average amount of time it will take an average customer in the House of Commons Tea Room to be served hot food when all facilities are fully operational. [9029]

Sir Colin Shepherd: As the new service has been in operation for less than two weeks, it is not possible at this stage to forecast the average time that it might take for a customer to be served hot food. I have, however, requested the Director of Catering Services to monitor the time taken to serve hon. Members; the Catering Committee will, of course, continue to keep the matter under review.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what surveys he intends to undertake on customer attitudes to the changes introduced in the House of Commons Tea Room over the last 12 months. [9030]

Sir Colin Shepherd: The Catering Committee is keeping the matter under constant review through informal consultation with hon. Members, scrutiny of the comments book in the Members' Tea Room and through discussions with the Director of Catering Services. Any formal survey would be conducted by the management of the Refreshment Department, and although I am not aware of any such plans at present, the Department has conducted annual in-depth surveys in June or July in each of the last three years.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Legislation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Attorney-General how many items of legislation relating to his Department have been repealed since January 1994; how many statutory instruments were introduced during the same period; and how many of the latter were *(a)* deregulatory and *(b)* fee orders. [9368]

The Attorney-General: I refer to the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

"New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans"

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what costs quoted in the document, "New labour's Public Expenditure Plans", were prepared in his Department; what detailed assumptions and interpretations were provided to officials in his Department to enable preparation of each cost; and what was the total cost to public funds of preparing each estimate. [6351]

Mr. Hanley: This Department, in conjunction with the Treasury, prepared factual material relating to costings published in "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" numbered 1, 2, 3 and 86. The detailed assumptions and interpretations that were provided to officials were set out in my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary's reply to the hon. Member of today. It is not the normal working practice to keep a record of the time spent in providing factual information to Ministers and it is not therefore possible to offer a reliable estimate of costs involved.

Hong Kong Governor

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what allowances are paid to the Governor of Hong Kong; and how they are treated for tax purposes. [9141]

Mr. Hanley: The Governor, like his predecessors, receives entertainment, education and leave allowances from the Hong Kong Government. These allowances are not subject to Hong Kong tax.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current salary paid to the Governor of Hong Kong; and what tax treatment applies to that salary. [9142]

Mr. Hanley: The Governor's current salary, paid by the Hong Kong Government, is HK$3,036,000 per annum, equivalent to about £237,000 at present exchange rates. This figure is set at 125 per cent. of the Hong Kong Chief Secretary's salary. The Governor's salary, like that of his predecessors, is not subject to Hong Kong tax. An independent review of the Governor's salary and tax position was commissioned in 1993, which recommended that there should be no change in the calculation of his salary or in its tax free status.

Children (Payment of Airfares)

Sir Alan Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many children under the age of 16 years had air fares subsidised *(a)* wholly and *(b)* partly by reason of their relationship to service personnel and employees of his Department for travel between the United Kingdom and (i) other EU

states and (ii) non-EU states in the last year for which information is available; and what was the total cost of the subsidy. [9321]

Mr Hanley: This Department does not distinguish by age between children in receipt of children's concessionary journeys. Officers serving overseas may claim the whole cost of no more than:

three journeys a year for children in primary or secondary boarding school education;

two journeys a year for unmarried children studying full-time for their first degree at university or college provided they have taken no more than one year away from full-time education;

one journey a year for unmarried children under 21 who are unemployed or undergoing vocational training.

In 1995–96, the last full year for which figures are available, this Department—diplomatic wing and Overseas Development Administration—paid for 145 air fares in respect of 120 children to EU countries, and for 1,091 air fares in respect of 728 children to non-EU countries. Total expenditure was £1,009,109.

Hong Kong (Contracts)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those major contracts which will straddle the transition in Hong Kong which have been considered by the Sino-British joint liaison group, the date of their award, the successful contractor and the approximate value of the contract. [9607]

Mr. Hanley: The Sino-British joint liaison group has discussed a large number of contracts and franchises which will straddle the transition. These include contracts on infrastructure development such as for the new airport, and the provision of power and transport services. I will write to the hon. Member with a full list of the contracts, and, where known, the dates of their award, the name of the successful contractors, and the value of each contract. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery (Northern Ireland)

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list *(a)* the number of projects in Northern Ireland which have been given funding by the Millennium Commission and *(b)* the number of projects from Northern Ireland which are currently under consideration by the Millennium Commission. [3841]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

"New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans"

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what costs quoted in the document, "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans", were prepared in his Department; what detailed assumptions and interpretations were provided to officials in his Department to enable preparation of each cost; and what was the total cost to public funds of preparing each estimate. [6344]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department of National Heritage, in conjunction with the Treasury, prepared factual material relating to costings published in "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" numbered 54 and 55. The detailed assumptions and interpretations that were provided to officials are set out in my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary's reply to the hon. Member of today. It is not the normal working practice to keep a record of the time spent in providing factual information to Ministers.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Web Site

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to open his own web site. [9438]

The Deputy Prime Minister: The matter is under consideration.

Legislation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many items of legislation relating to his Department have been repealed since January 1994; how many statutory instruments were introduced during the same period; and how many of the latter were *(a)* deregulatory and *(b)* fee orders. [9374]

Mr. Bates: An analysis of new regulations introduced by all Departments during 1994 and 1995 is given in the table. By the end of 1996 the total number of deregulatory orders will have risen to 1,000. Comprehensive information about the number of other regulations is only gathered after the end of the year. A fuller analysis of regulations made during 1996 will be carried out as soon as the necessary information is available from HMSO and will be provided to the hon. Member.

	1994	*1995*
Deregulatory measures	218	151
NHS Trusts	269	176
Fees and local provisions	188	152
EU and international obligations	151	140
Other (possible impact on business)	141	93
Other (no impact on business)	500	692
Commencement orders, Orders in Council and others not subject to Parliamentary procedures	1,867	1,963

A list of regulations repealed or amended since 1993 under the Government's deregulation initiative as at April 1996 was placed in the House Libraries in May. A revised list of the 1,000 regulations repealed or amended by the end of December will be published early in the new year.

No. 2 Marsham Street

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a progress report on the future of No. 2 Marsham street. [8126]

Mr. Freeman: Responsibility for the use of No. 2 Marsham street has been delegated under the terms of its framework document to the Property Advisers to the Civil Estate under its chief executive, Mr. Neil Borrett. The agency is therefore responding to the question.

Letter from N. E. Borrett to Mr. Harry Greenaway, dated 13 December 1996:

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has asked me to write to you in response to your Parliamentary Question regarding the future of 2 Marsham Street.

The decision to demolish 2 Marsham Street was announced by the Secretary of State for the Environment in February 1992. The current occupants, the Department of the Environment, are to relocate to Ashdown House and Eland House in Victoria following the completion of fitting out works now in progress. These moves are likely to be completed around Easter 1997. The other occupants of 2 Marsham Street, the Department of Transport, were successfully relocated to Great Minster House in 1995.

An international urban design competition was held earlier this year to produce designs which will guide the master planning for the future redevelopment of the site. Entrants were asked to submit designs which promoted a mixture of uses, make effective use of the available space and related well with the site's urban context. The results of the competition were announced by the Deputy Prime Minister in October. Work is planned to start on the demolition of 2 Marsham Street in April 1997 and to be completed in the Autumn of 1998, following which the site will be redeveloped for Government use if there is a requirement or sold.

TREASURY

"New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans"

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what interpretations or assumptions were made in costing the spending commitments described as having been made by the Labour party in the document, "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans"; and if the same interpretations and assumptions were adopted by each Government Department. [6338]

Mr. Waldegrave: The interpretations and assumptions identified by Ministers, assisted by their special advisers, are set out for each costing. These interpretations and assumptions were used by all Government Departments. In addition, general guidance was provided as set out in my separate written answer of today. Final responsibility for the judgments made in the document "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" rests with Treasury Ministers.

FOREIGN OFFICE

1. Increase Overseas Aid

The cost of restoring the Overseas Aid budget to the same percentage of GDP as in 1979.

2. Reverse cuts in the World Service and British Council

The cost of restoring funding to the BBC World Service and the British Council to the level in 1995–96 in real terms.

3. Rejoin UNESCO

The cost of rejoining UNESCO.

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE FISHERIES AND FOOD

4. Introduce an early retirement scheme for farmers

The cost of the United Kingdom taking up the CAP early retirement scheme, assuming a 25 per cent take up amongst eligible farmers.

5. Increase the number of state vets

The cost of employing the same number of veterinary staff as in 1979.

6. Create more Environmentally Sensitive Areas

The cost of a 10 per cent. increase in the current provision for ESAs.

DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

7. Establish Regional Development Agencies in England

The cost of:

8 English regional development agencies each with an annual administrative cost equivalent to that of the Welsh Development Agency.

The RSA budget to be increased overall so that England receives as generous a sum in relation to its proportion of total UK unemployment as the average of the Scottish and Welsh take.

8. Establish a Business Development Bank

The cost of a Business Development Bank on the same basis as the proposal from the Union of Independent Companies in 1993.

9. Introduce New Technology Trusts

Assume that the "trusts" provide more subsidy for R&D—about £15 million—less the costs of the existing Innovation Counsellors included in Business Links.

10. Introduce a Venture Capital Guarantee Scheme

The cost of a 10 per cent. increase in the Loan Guarantee Scheme.

88. Implement the Parental Leave Directive

The cost to the public sector of implementing the parental leave directive.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

11. Restore public ownership of the railways

The cost of a complete takeover of Railtrack by the Government assuming a 30 per cent. premium over the market price and external financing requirements to service debt and take account of forward investment plans.

12. Provide new investment in railway safety

The cost of:

1. Installation, operation and maintenance of Automatic Train Protection

2. Replacing 25 per cent. of carriages.

13. Build more high speed rail links

The cost of modernising the Great Western line (which runs from London to Cardiff) based on the CBI's estimate for electrification in their report "Winning Ways", 18 July 1996.

The cost of modernising the London to Norwich line and the Bristol to Penzance lines based on the cost per mile of modernising the East Coast Main Line at 1996–97 prices.

14. Reduce bus and rail fares in London

The cost of:

A 10 per cent. reduction in LT fares.

A 10 per cent. reduction in NSE fares.

15. Provide more investment in buses

The cost of an increase of 10 per cent. in Government support for local bus services.

16. Reduce freight track access charges

The cost of a 20 per cent. reduction in freight track access charges on the assumption that Railtrack has been renationalised.

17. Invest in a network of freight terminals

The cost of doubling the existing 5 Channel Tunnel freight terminals.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

18. Increase spending on house building

The increase in public spending if the stock of set aside receipts are released over five years and no set aside applies to new receipts.

19. Return business rates to local control

That in each year from 1997–98 to 2001–02, councils will choose to increase net revenue spending by 1 per cent. more than it would otherwise have been increased.

That the increase will be financed by additional increases in council tax and business rates, and that the percentage increase in each will be the same.

That the reserve powers to cap which Labour propose to retain would only bite on the dozen or so highest spenders, and so would only minimally affect overall spending.

20. End Council Tax capping

That in each year from 1997–98 to 2001–02, councils will choose to increase net revenue spending by 1 per cent. more than it would otherwise have been increased.

That the increase will be financed by additional increases in council tax and business rates, and that the percentage increase in each will be the same.

That the reserve powers to cap which Labour propose to retain would only bite on the dozen or so highest spenders, and so would only minimally affect overall spending.

21. Set up mortgage rescue scheme

The cost of providing extra grant to housing associations to enable them to buy up the property of people facing repossession. However, assume that only half choose to take advantage of the scheme.

22. End CCT in local government

The loss of expected future savings made from Compulsory Competitive tendering in local government.

23. Establish English Regional Assemblies

The cost of nine regional chambers with 50 members on average allowances of £2,500 and 50 support staff with average staff costs of £40,000 (including premises costs).

24. Establish a London authority

The cost of a strategic authority with:

1. 64 councillors.

2. A referendum.

3. Elections every 4 years.

HOME OFFICE

25. Establish a network of women's refuges

The cost of a network of women's refuges based on the following assumptions:

1. Refuge services cost £12,000 to £13,000 per family per annum (Women's Aid Federation report published in 1994).

2. One off Capital costs per refuge between £34,000 to £52,000 (London Housing Unit Report).

3. An extra 2,000 family bedspaces estimated on the basis of a recommendation by the Home Affairs Select Committee.

26. End the privatisation of prisons

The cost of:

1. Returning the four private sector prisons to the public sector.

2. Ending the contracting out of education.

3. Ending the contracting out of IT.

4. Ending the contracting out of seven court escort areas.

5. Returning the DCMF prisons to the public sector.

6. Ending market testing in the Home Office.

89. Provide referendums on voting reform and a Scottish Parliament

The cost of:

(A) a UK wide referendum; and

(B) a referendum in Scotland.

LEGAL DEPARTMENTS

27. Improve access to Legal Aid

The cost of reinstating the changes in eligibility since 1992.

28. Reform the Crown Prosecution Service

The additional costs associated with providing staff for each of the 43 police areas.

29. Establish a community legal service

The additional cost of employing the equivalent of 1½ salaried lawyers in each of the Citizens' Advice Bureaux, assuming some savings in the legal aid budget.

30. Change the design of court buildings

The cost of refurbishing Crown Courts and the larger magistrates courts, which have not already provided separate waiting facilities for witnesses and victims.

31. Introduce fast track sentencing for persistent young offenders

The cost of fast track sentencing for persistent young offenders.

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

32. Introduce sabbaticals for teachers

The cost of teachers with 10 years' service taking one sabbatical of one third of a year and the cost of teachers with 15 years or more service taking one sabbatical of a full year.

33. Introduce a new student loans scheme

The additional cost of extending student loans to cover the maintenance grant and to include fees and maintenance of part-time Higher Education students, assuming that the number of students entering Higher Education is not affected and that loan take up also remains unchanged (at 75 per cent.).

34. Double the number of students in higher education

The fifth year cost of a programme to steadily increase student numbers that would, after 20 years, have doubled the (percentage) participation rate among young people in full-time higher education.

35. Expand post-16 education

The additional cost of all 16 and 17 year olds who are currently not in any education staying on in full-time education in secondary schools.

36. Create a nursery place for every 3 year old

The cost of providing a nursery place for every 3 year old assuming that the voucher mechanism is used, that the value of the voucher is the same as for four year olds and the funding can be clawed back from local authorities in the same way as for 4-year olds.

37. Provide access to a lap top computer for every child

The cost of supplying one new lap top computer for 1 in 3 primary pupils over 8 years old and 1 in 3 secondary pupils if the computers cost about £1,000 each.

38. Increase capital spending on schools

The cost of increasing capital spending by £3.2 billion over 10 years by allowing schools to borrow the money from the banks, without taking account of interest rates.

39. Cable up every school—the cost of computer equipment and training

1. The cost of providing multimedia computers and Internet links to all schools assuming that BT pay the line, connection and on-line costs.

2. The additional cost of 2½ days training per teacher.

3. Assume that in secondary schools there would need to be one multimedia PC for every 10 pupils which would need to be networked throughout the school. In addition there would be one room with 30 PCs in each school. One in ten of the new computers would be connected to a good quality printer and to the Internet via an ISDN line. Each primary school would have one multimedia PC in each classroom with an extra three in each school, e.g. for the library. One computer in each school would be linked to the Internet.

40. Introduce a literacy guarantee at age 7

The cost of reintroducing the Reading Recovery Programme and extending it nationally.

41. Reduce class sizes for 5, 6 and 7 year olds

1. The cost of reducing class sizes to 30 or under for 5, 6 and 7 year olds.

2. Take a mid-point estimate of the range of possible costs.

42. Provide better teacher training

The cost of one day's extra training and supply cover per year for each teacher in maintained schools.

43. Establish intensive literacy summer schools

1. 300,000 pupils attend a 3 weeks summer school each year.

2. Pupils are taught in groups of 10 for 3 hours each day.

3. The cost of overheads is calculated in the same way as the ratio of overheads to teachers' salaries in LEA spending on schools.

4. Teachers can be recruited at the standard term-time supply rates.

44. Take steps to tackle youth employment

1. Each unemployed person receives on average £60 per week in benefits.

2. Each person offered a placement accepts it and completes a full six months.

3. 5 per cent. of participants leave the count and incur no further costs, 60 per cent. of those remaining receive wage subsidies, 20 per cent. enter training, 10 per cent. enter a placement with the voluntary sector and 10 per cent. with the Environmental task force.

4. It costs £2,000 to provide a placement in the voluntary or environmental task force—in line with the former Community Action Programme—and to fund a place in education/training.

45. Introduce a £75/week incentive for the long term unemployed

The cost of a £75 a week incentive which lasts 26 weeks for those unemployed over two years assuming no increase in the number of people getting work.

48. Re-establish the Community Action Programme

The cost of re-establishing the Community Action programme at its 1995–96 level.

49. Provide extra support to redundant workers

The cost of giving everyone who becomes redundant and joins the claimant count a place on Job Search Plus, as a replacement to the existing Job Search Plus scheme.

50. Provide better careers advice

The cost of 2 per cent. of the employed population having a full interview with a trained careers officer and a booklet.

51. Establish a University for Industry

The cost of an initial intake of 30,000 students based on the costs of the Open University.

52. Make the Re-Employment service available to non-working women

The cost of providing access to the Employment Service on a voluntary basis to non-working women who are not registered unemployed.

53. provide job advocates for the long term unemployed

The cost of extending the current "1-2-1" scheme to all people over 25 who complete one year in unemployment.

DEPARTMENT FOR NATIONAL HERITAGE

54. Introduce a national network of Millennium Volunteers

The cost of giving 100,000 young people each year a place as a Millennium Volunteer on the same basis as the Environmental Task Force, being paid the equivalent of benefit (£60/week) plus £20. Also assume that it costs an extra £2,000 to provide each place, in line with the costs of the former Community Action Programme.

55. Abolish admission charges to national museums

The cost of ending admission charges to museums and galleries funded by the Department of National Heritage.

56. Abolish the internal market in the NHS

The cost of abolishing the internal market in the NHS assuming that the average annual efficiency gain returned to the level before the reforms.

57. Withdraw PFI from the NHS

The cost of replacing private sector spending on Department of Health capital projects with public sector spending.

58. Introduce GP commissioning

The net cost of introducing GP commissioning and abolishing GP fundholding.

59. Increase spending on community care

The cost of £135 million extra spending on community care in 1993 uprated to 1996–97 prices.

60. Reintroduce a regional health structure

The cost of reintroducing the old Regional Health Authorities.

62. End CCT in the NHS

The loss of savings from compulsory competitive tendering in the NHS.

63. Phase out private provision from the NHS

The loss of net income generated by pay beds.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY

64. Reduce the benefit tapers

The cost of

1. (A) a reduction in the Family Credit taper from 70 per cent. to 40 per cent.

(B) a reduction in the Housing Benefit taper from 65 per cent. to 40 per cent.

and

2. (A) a reduction in the Family Credit taper from 70 per cent. to 30 per cent

(B) a reduction in the Housing Benefit taper from 65 per cent. to 30 per cent.

65. Introduce a Pension Entitlement/Minimum Guaranteed Income for Pensioners

1. The cost of a 100 per cent. take up of Income Support and the abolition of all capital rules, except those in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, with a 100 per cent. taper.

and

2. A Minimum Guaranteed Income for pensioners set at £80/week with a 100 per cent. taper.

66. Abolish the "16 hour rule"

1. The cost of making any student other than those undertaking full-time courses in higher education eligible for JSA.

2. Take a mid-point estimate of the range of costs.

67. Allow local benefit decisions

1. The cost of paying 500,000 unemployed claimants a year their income from JSA 6 months in advance.

2. In 20 per cent. of cases, this money has to be repaid again since it is lost by the recipient.

68. Abolish the Jobseeker's Allowance

The cost of abolition of the JSA.

69. Introduce a maintenance disregard against Income Support

The cost of a £20 maintenance disregard against Income Support.

70. Allow an Income Support carry over

Assume that anyone unemployed for 6 months or more and in receipt of means-tested JSA will receive payments at the same rate for four weeks after taking a job.

71. Provide work help for lone parents

The cost of:

(a) giving Lone parents on Family Credit free school meals.

(b) giving Lone parents on Family Credit a £10 per week disregard for work related expenses.

72. Increase the take up of Family Credit

An increase in the take up of Family Credit to 96 per cent.

73. Introduce a JET scheme

The cost of a JET scheme for lone parents similar to the Australian JET scheme.

74. Encourage those on benefit to do voluntary work

The cost of 1 in 12 unemployed people doing voluntary work assuming that they stay on benefit for four weeks longer than they would otherwise have done.

75. Introduce a Disabled Rights Bill

The cost of a Disability Rights Commission plus the cost to:

(A) reduce from 20 to 5 the number of employees used to define those small employers exempt from the DDA's employment rights.

(B) extend the DDA to cover those wrongly perceived to have a substantial disability.

76. Allow unemployed people to borrow against future earnings

1. The cost of giving 50 per cent. of people on JSA for over a year a £300 loan.

2. In 20 per cent. of those cases the money is not repaid. In the remaining 80 per cent. of cases, the money is repaid over an average 2 year period.

77. Introduce budgeting loans for the low paid

1. The cost of extending the Social Fund to Family Credit recipients.

2. Assume that 30 per cent. of households on Family Credit use the fund each year.

78. Introduce Income Support protection

The cost of providing an automatic re-entitlement to Income Support at the claimant's previous rate if the job ends within six months.

79. Introduce an income disregard for the wives of unemployed men

The cost of allowing any couple, in which one member of the couple declares themselves to be unemployed, to disregard an extra £5 in earnings in addition to the existing £10 disregard.

80. Increase the disregard in the JSA

The cost of doubling the disregard in JSA to £10 a week.

APPENDIX 1. *Introduce a flexible decade of retirement*

The cost of a full basic pension payable from the age of 60 assuming that the same percentage of eligible people claim the pension from the new state pension age as currently do so.

SCOTTISH OFFICE

81. Increase tree cover

The cost of extending tree cover by 50 per cent. by 2010.

82. Establish a Scottish Parliament

The cost of the level of provision planned by the then Government in the run up to 1979, taking account of the Scottish Constitutional Convention proposals published in 1995.

83. End the sale of Forestry Commission land

The loss of expected receipts from the sale of Forestry Commission land.

TREASURY

85. Introduce a National Minimum Wage

The estimated gross increase in the public sector pay bill assuming a Minimum Wage set at £4.00 per hour with a 50 per cent. restoration of differentials across the entire earnings distribution, using the 1995 New Earnings Survey.

87. Increase funding on Trans European Networks

The cost of the European Commission's recent proposal to increase spending on TENs.

In the case of the following costings Treasury Ministers accepted Labour's own estimate of the costs:

46. Broaden the take up of Investors in People

47. Introduce Learn as you Earn Smartcards

61. Cut waiting lists

In the case of No. 84, "Establish a Welsh Assembly", the estimate was made by the Secretary of State for Wales.

In the case of No. 86, "Establish a European Recovery Fund", Treasury Ministers took the figure of about £11 billion, the approximate UK share of a proposal for a European Recovery Fund which was supported by Labour MEPs in the European Parliament, and scaled this back to produce a costing of £250 million a year over five years.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance was given to civil servants in respect of assembling the factual material to facilitate the costings of the public expenditure commitments described as having been made by the Labour party in terms of territorial bases, price level and first or four-year commitment, including possible overlaps and other similar costings. [6339]

Mr. Waldegrave: The costings were conducted in accordance with the guidance on costing Opposition policy which was published as a memorandum submitted by the Cabinet Secretary to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee in March 1990, reproduced in "Guidance on Guidance: An index of Useful Documents" issued in February 1996 and available in the Library of the House. In addition, Ministers provided the following general framework to civil servants in respect of assembling the factual material.

GUIDANCE ON COSTINGS

Introduction

This note explains the basis on which proposals should be costed. It is important that all proposals are costed on a consistent basis.

2. There may be some proposals for which a costing consistent with this guidance would be inappropriate. *In such cases, please contact the Special Adviser to the Chief Secretary* to agree an alternative basis.

Which year?

3. Policy proposals which involve an ongoing annual cost should be costed in year 5, in 1996–97 prices.

4. Where year 5 gives a misleading impression of the cost—because the cost builds up rapidly after that, or is much higher before year 5, that should be indicated separately.

One-off costs

5. All costs are annual costs. Where proposals involve a one-off cost—such as the purchase of shares in a privatised industry—it should be marked clearly as a one-off cost in 1996–97 prices. That cost will be assumed to be spread over the 5 years of the Parliament (that is, a fifth of the one-off cost will be added to the annual cost in year 5).

Changes from plans

6. The costs should be expressed in terms of changes from current policies assuming that none of the other proposals to be costed are implemented. They should be defined as additions to GGE (broadly, central and local government spending including support for public corporations). The costs need not distinguish spending inside and outside the Control Total.

Revenue effects

7. Only the effects on General Government Expenditure should be included. If there are additional offsetting effects on revenues or on public corporations' borrowing, these should be identified separately, but not included in the costings.

Offsetting changes in expenditure

8. If a proposal would automatically and intrinsically lead to an offsetting reduction to spending elsewhere—such as benefit savings from putting unemployed people into a training programme—the proposal should be shown net of any changes to other spending programmes.

Phased costs

9. If a proposal is to "phase in" a policy then it should be assumed that this will be phased in over 5 years.

10. Policies which would be implemented only "as far and as fast as resources allow" should not be phased in, but calculated as if they were implemented immediately.

Behavioural effects

11. Behavioural effects should not be included unless they are intrinsic to the proposal. For example, the cost of allowing local authorities to spend capital receipts should not assume that capital disposals will increase. However, the cost of lifting capping would include an assumption that some local authorities would increase spending above their existing capping limits.

Prices

12. All costings should be shown in 1996–97 prices.

13. If it is necessary to assume a price level to calculate the costing, it should be assumed that prices will grow by 2 per cent. a year from 1997–98.

14. If other macroeconomic assumptions are required, they should be consistent with the 1996–97 FSBR. If assumptions are required that are not included in the FSBR, they should be agreed with the Chief Secretary's Special Adviser.

EU-related costs

15. Any proposal involving expenditure from the European Union budget should take account of the effect on the overall level of the EU Budget, the UK contribution and the abatement. Please discuss any costings involving European Union expenditure with the Chief Secretary's Special Adviser.

Territorial consequentials

16. The costings should include any consequentials in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland of policy changes in England. In the case of Social Security costings, there is a separate page to add in the costs of pledges for Northern Ireland. If you need assistance calculating these, please contact the Chief Secretary's Special Adviser.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was *(a)* the cost to his Department and *(b)* the overall cost of the exercise to cost the spending commitments described as having been made by the Labour party in the document "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans", published on 20 November. [6336]

Mr. Waldegrave: It is not the normal working practice to keep a record of the time spent in providing factual information to Ministers and it is not therefore possible to offer a reliable estimate of the costs involved.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what scrutiny over the exercise to cost what were termed Labour party public expenditure commitments was carried out by the Treasury; and what criteria were used when checking consistency with other available estimates of the costs. [6340]

Mr. Waldegrave: The exercise was carried out in accordance with the published guidance on the procedure for costing policies of opposition parties. Treasury Ministers, assisted by their special advisers, in conjunction with Ministers and special advisers from other Departments, were responsible for identifying the text of commitments together with any further interpretations or assumptions necessary to allow the commitments to be costed. Treasury officials, in conjunction with officials from other Departments, were responsible for providing factual material. Final responsibility for the judgments made in the document "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" rests with Treasury Ministers.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* their special advisers and *(c)* civil servants, identified the text of spending commitments described as having been made by the Labour party in the document "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans", published on 20 November. [6337]

Mr. Waldegrave: In accordance with the guidance, Ministers and their special advisers identified the text of commitments. To the best of my knowledge, civil servants other than special advisers did not identify the text of the commitments.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent the factual material provided by civil servants for preparation of the document "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" was altered by Ministers or special advisers; and what guidance was given about reconciling differences in costings. [6341]

Mr. Waldegrave: The costings published in "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" are consistent with the factual material provided by civil servants on the basis of assumptions made by Ministers.

In one case—the cost of establishing the Welsh Assembly—the estimate was made by the Secretary of State for Wales. In two cases—the cost of reducing benefit tapers and the introduction of a maintenance disregard against income support—the figures were calculated in cash terms rather than in real terms. Consequently these figures should have been slightly lower than quoted in the document. The figure for benefit tapers should have been £1.8 billion rather than £2.0 billion and the figure for the maintenance disregard against income support should have been £180 million rather than £200 million. In another case, namely the cost of an increase in funding on trans-European networks, the figure was calculated in ecus rather than in pounds. The annual cost should therefore have been £20 million rather than £27 million.

Unemployment

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of people out of work in the European Union as a whole on the basis of *(a)* benefit claimant count, *(b)* International Labour Organisation definitions and *(c)* the labour force survey definition. [7233]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 17 December 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the level of unemployment in the European Union.

Most European Union countries produce on administrative-based and a survey-based measure of unemployment. The benefit claimant count is the administrative measure of unemployment that applies to the United Kingdom. Because the administrative definitions of unemployment differ form country to country, the Office for National Statistics does not compile EU unemployment totals on this basis.

The Statistical office of the European Community (SOEC) published ILO based levels of unemployment derived from the Labour Force Surveys of its member countries. The latest figures from this source show that in spring 1995 there were 17.8 million people unemployed in the European Union.

SOEC also produce a monthly estimate of the level of ILO unemployment in the EU. These estimates are based on results from the spring 1995 Labour Force Surveys which are extrapolated to monthly (or quarterly) administrative unemployment statistics. The most recent estimate gives a figure of 18.1 million people ILO unemployed in September 1996.

Enclosed for your information is the latest edition of the booklet *How Exactly is Unemployment Measured?*, copies of which are also available in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many claimants have been recorded as experiencing at least one spell of unemployment in each jobcentre area since April 1992; [8304]

(2) how many claimants have been recorded as experiencing at least one spell of unemployment in Darlington since April 1992. [8305]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Alan Milburn, dated 17 December 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many claimants have experienced at least one spell of claimant unemployment in each Jobcentre area, in particular the Darlington area, since April 1992.

Information for each Jobcentre area could only be provided at disproportionate cost. However, since 1 April 1992, an estimated 20,760 claimants have experienced at least one spell of claimant unemployment at the Darlington Employment Service Jobcentre.

Economic and Finance Council

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer to the hon. member for Southport (Mr. Banks) of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *648–49*, on the Ecofin of 2 December, what matters were put to the vote; how the United Kingdom voted; and if he will place in the Library all documents tabled at the meeting. [8608]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: None of the items on the main agenda for the Ecofin Council of 2 December were put to the vote. No papers were tabled at the meeting, but as I noted in my answer of 4 December, several papers were discussed. A number of "A" points were also agreed at the meeting without, in line with normal practice, a formal vote on them being taken. Details of these points are given in the Council secretariat press release, document 12212/96, which will be placed in the House as soon as it is available. All the papers considered at Ecofin which were eligible for scrutiny have been deposited with the House.

Employment (York)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will name the jobcentres within the York travel-to-work area; and if he will list the number of people in *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employment in the York travel-to-work area (i) in April 1992 and (ii) currently. [8531]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr Hugh Bayley, dated 17 December 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistic to your recent question on jobcentres and the number of people in full-time and part-time employment in the York travel-to-work area.

There are to jobcentres in the York travel-to-work area. They are Clifford Street and Stonebow. The available information showing the levels of employment in the York travel-to-work area is for employees and is at September 1991 and September 1993. This is shown in the table below.

Employees in the York travel-to-work area: at September

	Full-time	*Part-time*	*All*
1991	64,200	27,900	92,100
1993	62,400	28,800	91,200

Source:
Census of employment, ONS.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of days at work which were lost in 1995 due to food poisoning from *(a)* salmonella, *(b)* campylobacter, *(c)* listeria, *(d)* E. coli 0157 and *(e)* other causes; and if he will make a statement. [9139]

Mrs. Angela Knight: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Bill Etherington, dated 17 December 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on estimates of the number of days lost due to different types of food poisoning.

This information is not available. The Labour Force Survey collects information on sickness absence, but does not ask respondents about the diagnosis of the cause of their sickness absence.

Running and Operating Costs Limits

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the final outturn for 1995–96 for *(a)* each running costs limit and *(b)* the Ministry of Defence's operating costs limit. [9743]

Mr. Waldegrave: The final outturn for 1995–96 for each running costs limit and the Ministry of Defence's operating costs limit are shown in the table.

	£000
Gross running costs limits	
Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Diplomatic Wing)	505,913
Overseas Development Administration	71,790
Intervention Board Executive Agency	32,377
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	309,252
Department of Trade and Industry	350,826
Office of Fair Trading	18,446
Office of Telecommunications	9,092
Office of Gas Supply	8,374
Office of Electricity Regulation	10,694
Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service	22,253
Department of Transport	395,188
Office of Passenger Rail Franchising	5,908
Office of the Rail Regulator	8,520
Department of the Environment	215,492
Health and Safety Commission	167,369
Property Holdings	17,891
PSA Services	36,238
Office of Water Services	8,893
Home Office	1,717,998
Charity Commission	21,356
Lord Chancellor's Department	430,943
Northern Ireland Court Service	17,898
Public Record Office	26,396
Crown Prosecution Service	223,890
Serious Fraud Office	10,285
Treasury Solicitor's Department	26,873
Crown Office	35,394
Department for Education and Employment	1,338,297
Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England	28,471
Department of National Heritage	28,097
Office of the National Lottery	2,061
Department of Health	228,270
Office of Population Censuses and Surveys	46,908
Department of Social Security	3,039,069
Scottish Office	325,177
Scottish Courts Administration	40,846
Scottish Record Office	5,151
General Register Office for Scotland	7,217
Welsh Office	74,983
Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales	3,374
Northern Ireland	773,734
HM Treasury	58,559
HM Customs and Excise	746,035
Inland Revenue	1,664,518
Department for National Savings	190,100
Registry of Friendly Societies	7,861
National Investment and Loans Office	1,217
Central Statistical Office	58,473
Office of Public Service	76,837
Cabinet Office: Other Services	41,935
Security and Intelligence Services	402,314
Privy Council Office	2,752
Net running costs limits	
Wilton Park (FCO)	692
ADAS Agency (MAFF)	8,716
Central Science Laboratory (MAFF)	0
Central Veterinary Laboratory (MAFF)	-7
Veterinary Medicines Directorate (MAFF)	0
Central Services (DTI)	0
Laboratory of the Government Chemist (DTI)	0
National Engineering Laboratory (DTI)	2
National Physical Laboratory (DTI)	0
Radiocommunications Agency (DTI)	0
Vehicle Certification Agency (DoT)	0
Transport Research Laboratory (DoT)	0
QE II Conference Centre (PH)	5,630
Building Research Establishment (DOE)	0
Ordnance Survey	11,692
Forensic Science Service (HO)	144
Historic Royal Palaces Agency (DNH)	0
NHS Estates Agency (DH)	0
Social Survey Division (OPCS)	476
Information Techonology Services Agency (DSS)	0
Resisters of Scotland	0
Valuation Office (IR)	1,619
Paymaster Agency	0
Government Actuary's Department	600
Civil Service College (OPS)	-455
Security Facilities Executive (OPS)	3,707
Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency (NI)	-168
Operating costs	
Ministry of Defence	16,476,988

Payment Performance

Mr. Spring: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he proposes to publish the league table of Departments' payment performance as announced in the Government response to the "Your Business Matters" conferences. [9949]

Mrs. Angela Knight: Departments' performance in paying invoices within the agreed credit terms, or 30 days where no such terms exist, for the period 1 June to 31 August 1996 are contained in the following table:

	Per cent.
National Investment and Loans Office	100.0
Office of Electricity Regulation	100.0
Privy Council Office	100.0
Defence Bills Agency	99.7
Department of National Savings	99.6
HM Land Registry	99.6
Office of Passenger Rail Franchising	99.5
Office of the Rail Regulator	99.0
Office for National Statistics	98.6
Exports Credit Guarantee Department	98.3
Office of the National Lottery	98.2
Office of Fair Trading	98.0
Department of Trade and Industry	97.7
Crown Prosecution Service	96.8
Registry of Friendly Societies	96.8
Office of Water Supply	96.4
Public Records Office	96.2
Health and Safety Executive	95.8
Office of Telecommunications	95.5
Department for Education and Employment	95.3
Registers of Scotland	95.3
Paymaster General	95.2
HM Treasury	95.1
Government Actuary's Department	95.0
Ordnance Survey	95.0
Scottish Office	95.0
Welsh Office	94.7
Northern Ireland Departments	94.0
Department of Social Security	94.0
Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers	93.9
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	93.8
Home Office	93.3
Royal Mint	93.0
Inland Revenue	92.5
Treasury Solicitors	92.2

A419
M1-A1
A1(M)
Waltham Forest HAT
German White Vehicles
Fazakerley Prison
A50
Immigration IT
OSIRIS (IT)
BA/POCL
A30
University Hospital Wales
MOD Handling Vehicles
TAFMIS IT
RAF White Vehicles
Naval Recruitment and Training
Lewisham DLR
M40
A19
Lowdham Grange Prison
Croydon Tramlink
Norfolk and Norwich Hospital

The list of 26 November represents a snapshot of significant PFI projects that individual departments have drawn to the attention of the Treasury's PFU. It was designed to provide an indication of the main areas of PFI activity, and may not be fully comprehensive. However I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library. I will arrange for similar updated lists to be placed there on a quarterly basis which reflects the regularity with which this information is now collected. However, primary responsibility for detailed project, or sector specific, information remains with individual Departments.

The cash sums alongside each project represents each Department's estimate on 26 November of expected capital investment associated with that particular project. The projected duration of each individual contract is not held centrally.

The list is available on request form the Treasury PFU and forms part of an information pack which is sent to people expressing a general interest in PFI. The list is updated from time to time. A previous version was included in the press pack accompanying the recent private finance panel conference.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legislation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many items of legislation relating to his Department have been repealed since January 1994; how many statutory instruments were introduced during the same period; and how many of the latter were *(a)* deregulatory and *(b)* fee orders. [9364]

Mr. Streeter: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General.

Judges (Performance Tables)

Mr. Patten: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will publish performance tables giving the number of cases heard by each judge in England and the number of occasions on which each judge had their decisions overturned on appeal. [9576]

Mr. Streeter: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. John Patten, dated 17 December 1996:

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of cases heard by each judge in England and the number of judges' decision overturned on appeal.

These figures are not held centrally and could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

TRANSPORT

"New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans"

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what costs quoted in the document, "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans," were prepared in his Department; what detailed assumptions and interpretations were provided to officials in his Department to enable preparation of each cost; and what was the total cost to public funds of preparing each estimate. [6350]

Sir George Young: The Department of Transport, in conjunction with the Treasury, prepared factual material relating to costings published in "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" numbered 11 to 17. The detailed assumptions and interpretations that were provided to officials are set out in my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary's answer to the hon. Member today. It is not the normal working practice to keep a record of the time spent preparing factual information to Ministers and it is not therefore possible to offer a reliable estimate of the costs involved.

A13

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the *(a)* design life span and *(b)* functional life of the Movers Lane bridge on the A13; [8060]

(2) when he expects the Renwick Road junction improvements on the A13 (i) will be started and (ii) completed; [8064]

(3) what is the annual daily flow of vehicles using the A13 this year and in each of the previous five years; [8054]

(4) what has been the cost of tendering the DBFO—design, build, finance and operate—improvements for the Roding Bridge and Movers Lane junctions on the A13; [8058]

(5) when and for what reasons the decision was taken not to build the proposed underpass for the junction of Movers Lane/River Road on the A13; [8062]

(6) how many accidents have occurred in each of the last five years on (i) the Lodge Avenue flyover on the A13 and (ii) the Movers Lane/River Road flyover on the A13;

(7) when the current traffic restrictions on the River Roding bridge and on the Movers Lane/River road on the A13 will be lifted; [8061]

(8) what plans he has to include a slip road in the realignment of the A13 at the junction of the Scrattons Farm estate and the A13; [8063]

(9) what is the annual daily flow forecast to use the A13 in each of the next two years on (i) weekdays and (ii) weekends; [8056]

(10) what is the annual daily flow of vehicles forecast to use the realigned A13 in the first year of the road opening for (i) weekdays and (ii) weekends; [8055]

(11) what is the annual daily flow of vehicles using the A13 between the M25 and the A406 in the current year and in each of the previous five years on (i) weekdays and (ii) weekends. [8057]

Mr. Bowis: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Margaret Hodge, dated 17 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent questions about traffic flows, accident data and other associated issues on the A13.

Tenders have yet to be invited for the A13 "Thames Gateway" DBFO project and therefore tendering costs are not yet known. However, I am pleased to advise you that the Highways Agency has recently invited interest from potential bidders. This project includes the Roding Bridge strengthening. Movers Lane junction improvement and other maintenance and improvement schemes.

The lane restrictions on the Roding Bridge and the weight restrictions on the Movers Lane/River Road flyover will remain in place until respectively the proposed bridge strengthening and junction improvement schemes have been implemented.

The proposed underpass at the junction of the A13 Movers Lane with River Road remains in the programme as part of the A13 Movers Lane junction improvement.

The Movers Lane/River Road flyover was built in 1966 as a temporary structure with a minimum design life of fifteen years. Since 1991 vehicles using it have been restricted to 7.5 tonnes. It is well maintained and capable of serving its present function for at least another five years.

For 1995, the annual average daily flow for all motor vehicles using the A13 between the M25 and the A406 ranged between 26,000 and 73,000 vehicles per day, with flows generally increasing toward the A406. Figures are only collected on a three year cycle and for 1992, they ranged between 23,000 and 66,000. Separate figures for weekdays and weekends are not available.

Detailed forecasts for the existing A13 for each of the next two years are not available, but a number of factors will affect the growth of traffic on the Barking and Dagenham section of the A13. Current trends suggest that in outer London traffic growth generally could be in the order of 2%. a year.

Traffic data regarding the annual average daily flow for all motor vehicles forecast to use the re-aligned A13 in the first year of the road opening separated out for weekday and weekends is not available in the form requested. However, at the public inquiry in 1990, it was forecast that the transfer of traffic to the new A13 route would be in the region of 60% with 40% on the existing road. Given the 2 per cent growth figure mentioned above, traffic on the new road on opening would be in the region of 38,000 vehicles per day. The actual figure will depend upon the growth rates which occur and development which similarly may or may not occur.

In each of the last five years, accidents numbers for the Lodge Avenue Flyover and the Movers Lane/River Road Flyover are as follows:

Year	*Number of personal injury accidents*
Lodge Avenue Flyover	
1991	7
1992	5
1993	6
1994	4
1995	6
1996	'2
Movers Lane/River Road Flyover	
1991	8
1992	3
1993	8
1994	4
1995	5
1996	'1

' Up to August.

The Highways Agency has no firm dates for the start and completion of the Renwick Road junction improvement scheme. This is a development-led scheme, which cannot commence until the developer has submitted proposals to the Highways Agency and these have been accepted.

The A13 West of Heathway to Thames Avenue scheme, on which work has just started, will be connected to the existing A13 Ripple Road at a new interchange. A link road will be built between this interchange and the Scrattons Farm Estate which will provide access to both the local and trunk road network.

Nuclear Waste (Transportation)

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to approve the arrangements for British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. to transfer crated plutonium contaminated material from its site at Drigg to the waste treatment complex at Sellafield; and if he will make a statement. [8911]

Mr. Watts: The arrangements will be approved when the small number of outstanding safety issues have been resolved to the Department's satisfaction. These are subject to ongoing discussions between the Department and BNFL.

Utilities (Transport Schemes)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to amend the regulations making utilities liable for 18 per cent. of the costs of diversionary works for major transport schemes. [9293]

Mr. Watts: I am discussing this issue with ministerial colleagues.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contributions were made by utility companies towards the costs of diversionary works for major transport schemes, including street-running tramways, in each year since 1992. [9296]

Mr. Watts: This information is not held centrally. However, no contributions would have been made under the relevant provisions of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 before they came into effect on 1 January 1993.

Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for his Department *(a)* how many people in total are employed, *(b)* how many of the total number of staff are (i) male and (ii) female and *(c)* how many (I) men and (II) women are employed on a (1) full-time and (2) part-time basis. [9481]

Mr. Bowis: The figures as at 1 December 1996 are:

	Total
(a) Number of employees	13,419
(b) (i) Number of males	7,414
(b) (ii) Number of females	6,005
(c) (I) (1) Number of full-time men	7,233
(c) (I) (2) Number of part-time men	181
(c) (II) (1) Number of part-time women	4,477
(c) (II) (2) Number of part-time women	1,528

Blackwall Tunnel

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what was the name of the company owning the vehicle which caused the closure of the Blackwall tunnel on 10 December and if he will make a statement; [9313]

(2) if he will make a statement on the circumstances and consequences of the closure of the Blackwall tunnel on 10 December; and what estimate has he made of the likely cost of the incident to businesses in London arising from traffic congestion during that day; [9315]

(3) what legal action he intends to take against the driver and owners of the vehicle which damaged the Blackwall tunnel on 10 December; [9314]

(4) what damage was caused to the Blackwall tunnel by the incident on 10 December; and what estimate he has made of the likely cost of repair work. [9312]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 17 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent questions about the incident at the northern entrance to the Blackwall Tunnel on the 10th December.

The circumstances on 10th December which resulted in the closure for some ten hours of the southbound Blackwall Tunnel are as follows. At approximately 2.30 pm the boom of a crane mounted on a lorry struck a sign gantry located 30 yards before the entrance of the southbound tunnel. No damage was caused to the tunnel itself, but the gantry was so badly damaged that it had to be removed completely. It took until just after midnight to complete this operation which necessitated the southbound tunnel being closed from 2.30 pm to 00.30 am. In addition the northbound tunnel had to be closed for about one hour while the central support was removed.

The gantry carried essential lane-control signing used for operating the contraflow system during the morning peak, and without it two way traffic cannot operate safely. Manual control of the contra flow system is not a viable option for safety reasons.

There was widespread traffic congestion in East London caused by the closure of the southbound tunnel. Some traffic diverted to the Dartford crossing and the Woolwich Ferry ran an extended service until 10.00 pm to assist with the diverted traffic. On subsequent mornings there have also been queues approaching the northbound tunnel, as two way traffic has not been able to use the southbound tunnel.

The Highways Agency recognises that this incident has caused considerable delays and inconvenience with a subsequent cost effect to businesses and has worked to bring the contraflow system back into operation at the earliest possible opportunity. We cannot make a realistic estimate of the losses.

Estimates of repair costs are at this stage preliminary but demolition and the installation of a temporary and then a permanent gantry are likely to cost in excess of one hundred thousand pounds.

The Highways Agency has, at present, no confirmed report of the name
of the company owning the vehicle that caused the closure of the tunnel. A full report of the incident is awaited from the police. When we receive full details of the incident we intend to seek to recover the costs of a replacement gantry from the owner of the lorry involved.

Air Service Negotiations

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department requested from the Civil Aviation Authority a balance of benefits analysis for the renegotiation of the United States-United Kingdom air service agreements, Bermuda 2, in 1995. [9187]

Mr. Bowis: The UK-US air negotiations in 1995 concerned small-scale changes to Bermuda 2 rather than a full renegotiation. The Department of Transport asked the Civil Aviation Authority to estimate the possible costs and benefits to UK airlines of certain specific features of the proposed deal, notably a modest relaxation of restrictions on flights to London from Chicago and Philadelphia, and some new code-sharing opportunities.

Mr. Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if it is his Department's policy in the context of significant air service negotiations to request from the Civil Aviation Authority a balance of benefits analysis; [9189]

(2) if he will list all the air service agreements negotiated over the last three years for which the Civil Aviation Authority was requested to provide a balance of benefits analysis. [9188]

Mr. Bowis: It is not the Department of Transport's policy to request an all-encompassing "balance of benefits" analysis from the Civil Aviation Authority before conducting air service negotiations, especially those which have the objective of general liberalisation. However, we regularly commission a cost-benefit analysis from the CAA when limited and specific commercial rights are under negotiation, and CAA staff are always invited to participate in air services negotiations, including preparatory UK delegation meetings.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many European member states have negotiated with the United States open skies agreements which grant fifth freedom rights to United States carriers. [9114]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 13 December 1996]:* We understand that the US has reached such agreements with the following European countries:

Austria
Belgium
Denmark

Finland
Germany
Iceland
Luxembourg
Netherlands
Norway
Sweden
Switzerland.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations his Department has made to the United States Government regarding the restrictions imposed on United Kingdom airlines within the United States aviation market; and if he will make a statement; [9113]

(2) in what circumstances his Department will grant fifth freedom rights to United States carriers; and if he will make a statement; [9115]

(3) what are the United Kingdom's objectives for the renegotiation of the US-UK air service agreements (Bermuda 2); and if he will make a statement. [9112]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 13 December 1996]:* The Secretary of State's objective in the current negotiations with the US on air services is to reach a liberal aviation arrangement to the benefit of the UK. Both access to the internal US market and fifth freedom rights are being discussed within the current negotiations.

Road Safety Research

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide a list of research projects, together with their start and end dates, initiated or planned in preparation for the setting of road safety targets after the year 2000; and if he will provide a summary of the aims and the work being undertaken within each project. [9319]

Mr. Bowis: We have only one research project planned or in progress on road safety targets after the year 2000—"Analysis and Exposure Monitoring Requirements for Post 2000 Targets". The project started on 17 June 1996 and is due to end on 16 June 1998.

The aim of this study is to provide analysis of past and future trends in casualty reductions in order to help develop soundly based new road safety targets post-2000.

The research will involve a systematic analysis of trends in casualty numbers taking account of current assumptions about traffic growth, demographic change, and other relevant factors. Possible new measures for casualty reduction which would be required to achieve a new target will be evaluated and costed. It will also consider how a future target should be monitored and future requirements for vulnerable road user exposure data.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the terms of reference are of the evaluation of the hazard perception testing working party set up by the road safety division of his Department; what its membership is; what progress it has made; and when it is expected to report. [9424]

Mr. Bowis: We are at present considering membership for an advisory group on the possible future use of hazard perception testing. Initial approaches have been made to several representative groups including: the Transport Research Laboratory, the Driving Standards Agency, DriveSafe Services Ltd. who administer the theory test for learner drivers, driver instruction bodies, the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety, the Northern Ireland Driver and Vehicle Testing Agency, and other experts. There are no plans to ask any group to produce a report: the aim is to provide the Department with a source of advice.

Legislation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many items of legislation relating to his Department have been repealed since January 1994; how many statutory instruments were introduced during the same period; and how many of the latter were *(a)* deregulatory and *(b)* fee orders. [9370]

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

Road Vehicles (Pollution)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the feasibility of reducing the environmental disbenefits of current models of motor car. [9214]

Mr. Bowis: My Department has commissioned a number of research projects aimed at assessing and controlling the environmental impact of current models of cars. These are listed in the table and further details are available on the Department's internet web site at http://www.open.gov.uk/dot/rvs/rv-res00.htm. On completion, all projects will be evaluated for cost effectiveness, practicality and, if appropriate, their wider application in an EU context.

Reference	*Project title*
S010E/VB	In-service emissions from current fleet
S010K/VB	In-service emissions testing of catalyst-equipped vehicles
S360D/VB	Detection of vehicles burning lubricating oil
S031J/VB	Road and tyre noise: collaboration to reduce tyre noise
S030L/VB	In-service noise testing
S026F/VB	Diesel smoke test procedures and meter specifications
S260F/VB	Vehicle fuel consumption and emissions forecasts
S360B/VB	Remote measurement of vehicle emissions
S260H/VB	Petrol and diesel emissions factors measurement
S140A/VB	Vehicle particulate emissions measurement

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the *(a)* feasibility and *(b)* desirability of encouraging industrial innovation to reduce the environmental disbenefits of current models of bus; and if he will make a statement. [9215]

Mr. Watts: There is no doubt that industrial innovation can help to reduce the environmental disbenefits of buses. This has already been demonstrated by the technological advances that are now being applied to new diesel engines in order to meet the tighter emission standards for heavy vehicles, including buses, that came into force on

1 October this year. My Department works closely with both our European partners and the European Commission to develop progressively tighter emissions standards, a strategy which is providing extremely successful in encouraging industrial innovation and results in significant reductions in emissions from all categories of vehicle.

Coastguard Towing Vessels

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library HM Coastguard's report on the winter trials of the emergency towing vessels stationed in Dover and Stornoway. [9224]

Mr. Bowis: HM Coastguard's report on winter trials of the emergency towing vessels stationed in Dover and Stornoway will be published very shortly, and a copy will then be placed in the Library.

Lorry Drivers (Delays Abroad)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations have been made to the Greek Government in respect of providing *(a)* protection, *(b)* freedom of movement and *(c)* compensation to British drivers. [9423]

Mr. Watts: The British ambassador in Athens saw the Greek Minister of the Interior on 11 December when he asked that British drivers be given all support and protection. The following day my noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping spoke in Brussels to the Greek Transport Minister about the position of trapped British drivers and compensation. I am pleased to say that almost all the British drivers known to have been detained in Greece are now clear of the blockades.

Mr. Smith: To as the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what discussions have taken place at the Council of Ministers regarding the issue of compensation claims from British lorry drivers who were delayed by the French lorry drivers' dispute; [9421]

(2) what discussions have taken place at the Council of Ministers regarding the issue of British lorry drivers currently delayed in Greece. [9422]

Mr. Watts: The blockades of lorries in both France and Greece were discussed at the Transport Council last week. The French and Greek Transport Ministers both responded positively. The French Minister repeated the assurances she had previously given to my right hon. Friend that claims for compensation will be considered as quickly as possible.

BEST Pension Fund

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the correspondence which has passed between the trustees of the BEST pension fund and his Department. [9390]

Mr. Watts: A copy of the letter which my right hon. Friend wrote to NBC Pension Trustees Ltd. on 27 November has already been placed in the Library. Because of the possibility of legal proceedings, I do not believe that it would be appropriate to place other correspondence in the Library.

Public Transport (Assaults)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many attacks on *(a)* passengers and *(b)* staff have been (i) reported (ii) resulted in prosecutions and (iii) resulted in convictions in each of the last five years broken down by (1) gender and (2) age bands of 10 years on *(x)* London Underground, *(y)* each of the bus companies operating in London and *(z)* each of the railway companies; and if he will make a statement. [9608]

Mr. Bowis: The information is not available in the form requested.

West London Line

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from the British Railways Board on the funding of the noise mitigation scheme on the West London line; and if he will make a statement. [8742]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* Following discussions with the British Railways Board, the Government have taken steps to ensure that the board is able to meet its commitment to part-fund noise mitigation works on the West London line. It is now up to the board to take this forward with the local authorities concerned.

Policies and Programme

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date the 1997–98 settlement for the transport policies and programme will be announced; and in what format the details will be published. [9159]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* Details of the settlement were released on 16 December. Copies of the press release containing a full analysis of data were placed in the Library of the House. They were also placed in Members' mail boxes in the Members' post office counter.

Bus Employees Superannuation Trust

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library the correspondence between himself and his predecessor and the trustee of the bus employees superannuation trust over the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [9177]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* A copy of the letter that my right hon. Friend wrote to the NBC Pension Trustees Ltd. on 27 November has already been placed in the Library. He and his predecessor have written no other letters to the company.

DEFENCE

Aviation Repairs

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans he has for privatisation in the field of defence aviation repair; and if he will make a statement; [8828]

(2) what consultations his Department plan in respect of the possible formation of a Defence Aviation Repair Agency; and if he will make a statement; [8825]

(3) what plans he has to establish a Defence Aviation Repair Agency; and if he will make a statement. [8827]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The armed forces requirements for deep aviation repair are currently the subject of a prior options review to determine the optimum means of providing this service. The team conducting this review has consulted widely with establishments concerned, including trades union representatives. They have also consulted industrial companies who undertake deep aviation repair. This review is expected to be completed in the new year.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Doctor Wisley's epidemiological study in relation to illnesses arising from the Gulf war and other operations is complementary to those announced by the Minister of State in his statement of 10 December, *Official Report,* columns *119–23;* and if he will make a statement. [9172]

Mr. Soames *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* In commissioning the two studies that I recently announced my Department sought to complement rather than duplicate federally-funded US research. To this end, the Medical Research Council was briefed about Dr. Wessely's study before the council made its recommendations to the MOD. The three projects will be carefully co-ordinated to ensure that they complement each other.

Children (Payment of Air Fares)

Sir Alan Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many children under the age of 16 years had air fares subsidised *(a)* wholly and *(b)* partly by reason of their relationship to service personnel and employees of his Department for travel between the United Kingdom and (i) other EU states and (ii) non-EU states, in the last year for which information is available; and what was the total cost of the subsidy. [9320]

Mr. Soames: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Legislation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many items of legislation relating to his Department have been repealed since January 1994; how many statutory instruments were introduced during the same period; and how many of the latter were *(a)* deregulatory and *(b)* fee orders. [9359]

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer given today by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Bowman Radio Communications Contract

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning his Department's competition policy in relation to the Bowman radio communications contract. [9659]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Bowman programme has been pursued in accordance with Ministry of Defence procurement policy, whereby the Department seeks competition wherever possible. The programme is in the project definition phase, which is being undertaken by two competing consortia, Yeoman led by Siemens Plessey Systems and Racal, and Crossbow, led by ITT UK Ltd. The MOD is currently examining the procurement options open to the Department for production, including the scope for competition at sub-contractor level. Whichever procurement route is chosen for Bowman, MOD will aim to secure the maximum practicable level of competition.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to announce the award of the Bowman radio communications contract. [9657]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The procurement options for the Bowman production phase are currently being evaluated by the Ministry of Defence. A decision on the way ahead will be announced as soon as possible.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what criteria he will base his decision to award the Bowman radio communications contract. [9658]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The criteria for placing a contract for the Bowman production phase will be consistent with departmental procurement policy, which aims to obtain the best overall value for money for the Defence budget. Securing the maximum practicable level of competition will be central to the achievement of this objective.

Royal Scots Dragoon Guards (Bosnia)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his statement to the Scottish Grand Committee on 25 November, *Official Report,* column *6,* if he will make a statement on the number of men and quantity of equipment available to the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards in Bosnia. [9392]

Mr. Soames: There are 343 Royals Scots Dragoon Guards currently serving in Bosnia and Croatia. They are equipped with 15 Challenger tanks and a total of 44 tracked armoured vehicles. The remainder of the regiment is conducting training and rear party duties. Two squadrons of tanks which are not required for the current deployment have been retained in Germany.

Officers (Retirement)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many officers in each service and by rank have been retired on full pay in each year since 1992; and what was the annual cost in each category. [9445]

Mr. Soames: None. The armed forces pension scheme makes no provision for the retirement of officers, or other ranks, on full pay.

Clansman Radio Communications System

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the current operational effectiveness of the Army's Clansman radio communications system. [9660]

Mr. Soames: The operational effectiveness of all in-service equipment is kept under constant review. Clansman continues to provide a useful capability and will be maintained in-service until it is replaced by Bowman.

"Competing for Quality"

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he proposes to announce the result of the "Competing for Quality" competition at RAF Sealand, Deeside, Flintshire; and if he will make a statement. [8826]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the then Minister of State for Defence Procurement, announced on 18 October 1994, Official Report, column 237, his intention to undertake a "Competing for Quality" programme for all activities at RAF Sealand. After a hard-fought competition, I can now announce that the in-house bid team has been selected, against two commercial bidders, and that my Department intends to enter into a service level agreement with the team, beginning in April next year. The competition has resulted in significant savings and will safeguard the important role of RAF Sealand in providing crucial support to the front line. I congratulate the in-house team on the imagination and hard work shown in putting together the winning bid.

Ministry of Defence Police

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the standard disciplinary procedures for his Department's police force; who is the nominated disciplinary officer; and who deputises in the absence of the nominated disciplinary officer. [8935]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief constable/chief executive of the Ministry of Defence Police. I have asked the chief constable/chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from W.E.E. Boreham to Mr. John McFall, dated 17 December 1996:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about disciplinary procedures within the Ministry of Defence Police, as this falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Constable/Chief Executive of the Ministry of Defence Police Agency.

The Ministry of Defence Police (Discipline) Regulations 1985, (as amended 1988) are based on the Home Office Police Discipline Regulations.

The Deputy Chief Constable is responsible for deciding the level of disciplinary action to be taken in complaints against police and reported disciplinary matters.

If it is decided by the Deputy Chief Constable that formal disciplinary proceedings by way of a hearing are required, the officer(s) will appear before either the Chief Constable or a nominated Assistant Chief Constable depending on the seriousness of the matters complained of, and the levels of punishment thought appropriate.

However, all complaints against police matters in England and Wales are referred to the independent Police Complaints Authority in the same way as for all other Home Department Police Forces. Complaints matters in Scotland are dealt with in exactly the same way as those considered by Scottish Chief Constables with their Forces. There is no provision in Scotland for an independent body for complaints against the police other than Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (Scotland) to whom a complainant may refer if dissatisfied with the Chief Constable's decision. In Northern Ireland complaints are referred to the Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland.

Young Service Personnel

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British soldiers under the age of 18 years are serving in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* Bosnia. [9299]

Mr. Soames: The number of British soldiers under 18 years of age who are currently serving in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* Bosnia is 44 and 32 respectively.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

"New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans"

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what costs quoted in the document, "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans", were prepared in his Department; what detailed assumptions and interpretations were provided to officials in his Department to enable preparation of each cost; and what was the total cost to public funds of preparing each estimate. [6352]

Mr. Lang: The Department of Trade and Industry, in conjunction with the Treasury, prepared factual material relating to costings published in "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" numbered 7,8,9,10 and 88. The detailed assumptions and interpretations that were provided to officials are set out in my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary's reply to the hon. Member today. It is not the normal working practice to keep a record of the time spent in providing factual information to Ministers and it is not therefore possible to offer a reliable estimate of the costs involved.

Business Links

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what monitoring process will be used by his Department to ensure that merging the business links budget into a single budget will be cost effective; and what checks will be in place to ensure that money is being targeted effectively by business links. [8937]

Mr. Page: Merging the business links budget into a single budget stream is part of a simplification process which also involves relating funding to achievements. Bids for business links service funding are submitted by training and enterprise councils which are required to assess the business support services required in the local area in a business plan which will also describe how the TEC will monitor achievements and impacts. The TEC will be required to submit regular management information to the Government Office, have regular reviews of the targets and milestones in the business plan with the Government Office contract manager, satisfy financial appraisal and monitoring checks and provide evidence of achievements against plans before each contracting round. In addition, my Department has a programme of independent evaluation to check that Government funding is being targeted in a way that secures optimum value for money.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many business links have not proved financially viable; and what has been the total amount of funding provided by the Government. [8938]

Mr. Page: The Department of Trade and Industry's contribution towards establishing the business links network is approximately £54 million over the period 1993–94 to 1995–96. Over the same period the Department has provided £113 million for business support services. For the current financial year the Department has made available £49 million for establishing the network and £81 million for business support services. No business link has proved not be financially viable.

Offshore Petroleum Licensing

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current position of the 17th round of offshore petroleum licensing. [9728]

Mr. Page: I am pleased to announce that the Petroleum (Production) (Seaward Areas) (Amendment) Regulations 1996 came into force on 16 December 1996. These regulations vary the terms and conditions of petroleum licences to reflect the nature of the acreage to be awarded in the 17th round.

Following the entry into force of the regulations, the formal notice offering tranches within the UKCS for licence in the 17th round of offshore licensing will soon be published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*. This will set out the detailed terms of the round, including the format of applications, the information required with the application, the criteria to be used in assessing applications and the date by when applications must be received which will be no earlier than 90 days after the notice appears.

In order to provide as much flexibility to applicants as possible, applications may be made from 6 January 1997 until the closing date. No decisions about licence awards will be taken until after the closing date for applications and after all applications have been thoroughly assessed.

Chemical Weapons Act 1996

Mr. Lidington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the operation of the Chemical Weapons Act 1996. [9863]

Mr. Lang: The Chemical Weapons Act 1996 entered into force on 16 September 1996.

In consultation with industry and other interested parties, my Department has continued with preparations to implement the chemical weapons convention in the United Kingdom from when it comes into effect on 29 April 1997. The Chemical Weapons (Notification) Regulations 1996 and the Chemical Weapons (Licence Appeal Provisions) Order 1996 have been made; the production, possession and use of the most toxic chemicals is now subject to licence, with a more refined licensing system to be introduced from 1 January 1997; the first stage of the process of collecting information to enable the compilation of the United Kingdom's initial declaration to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons has started; and consultation on the composition of the advisory committee is also well advanced. I hope to be able to make an announcement about the appointment of the committee's chairman soon.

EU Research Council

Mr. Lidington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the outcome of the EU Research Council on 5 December. [9862]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The main issue considered by the Council was the Commission's revised proposal for 100 million ecu additional funding for the fourth framework programme for research and technological development. The Council agreed the proposal subject to a statement in the minutes by the Council and Commission recognising the need for the Council to examine urgently, on the basis of detailed figures provided by the Commission, the expenditure pressures expected to arise in category 3 of the EU's financial perspectives until the end of the current financing period. This statement was included to respond to concerns expressed by the UK, and shared by other member states, that the proposal should be fully compatible with the financial perspectives. The Netherlands and Sweden entered reservations that are expected to be raised as and when the European Parliament confirm funding agreed by the Budget Council for research and TENs—trans-European networks—in the final stages of the EU's 1997 budgetary process. The areas to be funded from the 100 million ecu match the United Kingdom priorities well, especially research on transmissible spongiform encephalopathies and vaccines, and on aeronautics technologies.

The Council had a brief discussion of the Commission's proposals for the structure of the fifth framework programme outlined in its working paper, "Towards the Fifth Framework Programme: material for the policy debate". Most member states shared the reservations expressed by the UK, that substantial further consideration was needed of programme objectives and management mechanisms to achieve the aim of a focused, user-driven programme.

The Council agreed conclusions endorsing the Commission's proposed research strategy for transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, which specifies priority research areas and embodies provisions that will ensure that the research undertaken is of the highest quality. The Council also agreed conclusions on the treatment of SMEs in the framework programme, the role of the joint research centre and the contribution of research to the fight against drugs.

Science, Engineering and Technology Expenditure

Mr. Lidington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he has reviewed the interrelationships between the science, engineering and technology expenditure of Government Departments. [9864]

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government chief scientific adviser has carried out such a review at my right. hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade's request. A report of the review is published today and I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

Newspaper Publishers

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received regarding the conclusion of the recent report of the Committee for Diversity and Pluralism on the space available for minority titles; and if he will make a statement. [7965]

Mr. Page: I have seen a copy of the report and noted the comments about the distribution of newspapers and magazines.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what conclusions his Department has reached in respect of the recent recommendations about home news delivery made by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and what assessment he has made of representations from local professional newsagents regarding margin decreases imposed by newspaper publishers. [7964]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The MMC last reported on newspaper distribution in 1993. It made no recommendations in respect of home delivery.

Newsagents' margins on the sale of newspapers are a commercial matter for the parties concerned.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the conclusions of the recent report of the Committee for Diversity and Pluralism relating to newspaper publishers' imposed margins; and if he will make a statement. [8582]

Mr. Page: I have seen a copy of this report and noted its contents.

Offshore Installations (Pollution)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what records his Department compiles of the oil company names and the oil drilling rigs and platforms involved in oil spillages and discharges in United Kingdom licensed blocks in the *(a)* North sea and *(b)* North Atlantic. [9500]

Mr. Page: Oil spills and oily discharges from oil and gas installations on the United Kingdom continental shelf are reported on an installation by installation basis to my Department. This information is then compiled on an annual basis to provide the records contained in the "Energy Report", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

The reports prior to 1994 are held in a non-electronic form on file in chronological order, whilst those from 1994 are held electronically and can thus be more readily sorted to give information on a company or installation basis.

European Business Survey

Mrs. Roche: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when his Department received a copy of Grant Thornton's spring 1996 European Business Survey; and what assessment he has made of the survey. [9281]

Mr. Page: My Department received a copy of Grant Thornton's 1996 "European Business Survey" when it was published in May of this year.

I welcome the survey and have noted its findings. The Government place great emphasis on listening to and responding to the views of business. Grant Thornton's "European Business Survey" is an important contribution to that process. It provides a comprehensive, comparative analysis of the opinions of small and medium-sized enterprises in 17 European countries, including the United Kingdom, on a wide range of issues relevant to their competitiveness.

Airline Alliance

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the undertakings and conditions he has proposed in relation to the British Airways/American Airlines alliance are subject to amendment; and if he will consult on them with *(a)* the public and *(b)* interested parties. [9420]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced on 6 December that the parties to this alliance would have to agree to certain undertakings and conditions if they were to avoid a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. In asking the Director General of Fair Trading to negotiate these undertakings he explicitly invited all interested third parties to make known their views on the proposals. Representations should be made to the Office of Fair Trading by 5 pm on 10 January 1997.

CE Energy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he proposes to refer the bid for Northern Electric by CE Energy to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission; and if he will make a statement. [9310]

Mr. John M. Taylor *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced on 13 December that he had decided not to refer CE Electric UK plc's proposed acquisition of Northern Electric plc to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

SOCIAL SECURITY

"New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans"

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what costs quoted in the document, "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans", were prepared in his Department; what detailed assumptions and interpretations were provided to officials in his Department to enable preparation of each cost; and what was the total cost to public funds of preparing each estimate. [6348]

Mr. Lilley: The Department of Social Security, in conjunction with the Treasury, prepared factual material relating to costings published in "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" numbered 64 to 80. The detailed assumptions and interpretations that were provided to officials are set out in my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary's reply to the hon. Member today. It is not the normal working practice to keep a record of the time spent in providing factual information to Ministers and it is not therefore possible to offer a reliable estimate of the costs involved.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much per year a claimant on invalidity benefit is allowed to earn under the therapeutic rule without it having any effect on his benefit; and if he will make a statement. [6901]

Mr. Burt: Incapacity benefit recipients are permitted to work for up to 16 hours per week provided that such work has been certified by their general practitioner as being beneficial to their specific medical condition. Such work will not normally affect benefit entitlement unless earnings exceed £45.50 per week.

Retirement Pension

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of *(a)* the number of pensioners (i) aged 75 years and over and (ii) aged under 75 years and *(b)* the cost of the flat-rate basic retirement pension, at 1995–96 prices, for the years (1) 1995–96, (2) 2000–2001, (3) 2010–2011, (4) 2020–2021 and (5) 2030–2031. [8016]

Mr. Heald: There are 4.3 million pensioners aged 75 years and over, and 6.2 million pensioners aged under 75 at 31 March 1996.[1]

Estimates for the expenditure on basic state retirement pension at 1995–96 prices for the specified years are given in the table.[2]

1995–96 prices £ billion

Year	*Expenditure on basic state retirement pension for pensioners aged under 75*	*Expenditure on basic state retirement pension for pensioners aged 75 and over*	*Total expenditure on basic state retirement pension*
1995–96	15.9	11.0	26.9
2000–01	16.8	12.8	29.5
2010–11	19.8	13.5	33.3
2020–21	19.4	15.8	35.3
2030–31	22.7	19.8	42.5

Notes:

[1] Figures are for all countries and are rounded to the nearest 100,000. State retirement pension includes all contributory and non contributory state pensions.

[2] Figures are rounded to the nearest £100 million.

Source:

Government Actuaries Department.

Contributory basic retirement pension: the Government Actuary's Department. The figure for 1995–96 is based on the draft accounts for the national insurance fund for 1995–96. The figures for 2000–2001 onwards are based on the report by GAD on the "Financial Effects of the Pension Bill 1994 on the National Insurance Fund", Cm 2714, and assume price uprating of benefits and the equalisation of state pension ages at 65 by 2020. The expenditure on basic state retirement pension for pensioners above and below the age of 75 has been calculated using GAD population projects.

Non-contributory retirement pension: departmental estimates based on the departmental report.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the future of the disability working allowance. [8210]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The Government are committed to helping sick and disabled people who wish to return to work and disability working allowance is an important element of our approach. This benefit is providing valuable help to an increasing number of people: currently there are nearly 11,000 recipients, more than double the number 18 months ago. Similarly, expenditure for 1995–96 has risen to an estimated £15 million, just under three quarters of the total spend for the first three years.

Research conducted by the Policy Studies Institute into the performance of disability working allowance has recently been published and this, along with our own more recent management information, will be used to continue to look at ways of refining and improving the benefit.

Benefit Fraud Hotline

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of reports to the benefits cheat information line have proved unfounded to date; and what redress is available to those wrongly accused. [8073]

Mr. Heald: It is too early to give any indication of the number of unfounded or successful referrals generated by calls from the public to the hotline. Fraud investigations often take some time to process, to ensure that fraud is proven before someone has their benefit stopped.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 17 October 1996, *Official Report*, columns *1086-87*.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the annual cost of running the national benefit fraud hotline; [8924]

(2) what has been the total cost of the national benefit fraud hotline since it was set up. [8923]

Mr. Heald: The annual cost of running the national benefit fraud hotline will be approximately £1.5 million per annum. Information regarding running costs to date is not available.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent on advertising the national benefit fraud hotline in 1996–97. [8926]

Mr. Heald: The answer is £500,000.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average number of calls made to the national benefit fraud hotline each month. [8921]

Mr. Heald: The average number of calls to the national benefit fraud hotline per month is 27,791.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the cost of setting up and running the benefit fraud hotline; and if he will make a statement. [9444]

Mr. Heald: The cost of operating the national benefit fraud hotline is £1.5 million per annum.

War Pensions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) in what circumstances individuals may claim a war pension; and if he will make a statement; [8205]

(2) how many people are currently *(a)* claiming and *(b)* entitled to claim a war pension; and if he will make a statement. [8204]

Mr. Heald: In October 1996, the latest month for which figures are available, the War Pensions Agency received a total of 3,300 new claims for war disablement and war widows pensions. At 31 October 1996, 326,716 War Pensions were in payment. A war disablement pension may be claimed by any former member of the armed forces who considers that disablement may be due to an injury attributable to, or aggravated by, service. A war widow's pension may be awarded where the late husband's death was due to, or hastened by, service. Similar schemes exist in respect of disablement or death sustained outside the armed forces as a result of enemy action during the second world war, for example, by members of the merchant navy.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many new claims for war pensions were made in each of the last five years by people aged over 65 years. [8662]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library a copy of the medical evidence in relation to hearing loss of war pensioners which was presented to the Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions. [8719]

Mr. Heald: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) on 12 December, *Official Report*, column *360*.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are currently in receipt of a war pension in the age categories (i) 20 to 30 years, (ii) 30 to 40 years, (iii) 40 to 50 years, (iv) 50 to 60 years, (v) 60 to 70 years, (vi) 70 to 80 years and (vii) over 80 years; and if he will make statement. [9446]

Mr. Heald: The information is not available in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

However, information regarding the number of people in receipt of a war disablement or war widow's pension at 30 November 1996, the most recent date for which information is available, by age is in the table.

Age band	*Disabled*	*Widows*
Under 21	76	2
21–30	3,986	81
31–40	8,801	467
41–50	13,676	858
51–59	23,457	1,649
60–64	22,827	1,802
65–69	26,074	3,821
70–80	136,799	29,891
81—90	30,482	18,886
91–100	984	2,162
Over 100	38	50

Deafness

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on proposed reductions for higher deafness pensions; and how many war pensioners will be affected. [8665]

Mr. Heald: No reductions in war disablement pensions awarded in respect of a hearing disability have been proposed. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been advised that there has been a change in medical opinion on the effect of noise-induced sensorineural hearing loss on a subsequent hearing loss due to other causes such as aging.

Where medical matters need to be determined on a claim for, or application for review of, an award of a war disablement pension, the law requires that part of the claim to be determined by a medical officer appointed by the Secretary of State. The medical officer certifies whether or not the disablement is due to or aggravated by service in the armed forces, and also the degree of disablement due to service. The Secretary of State is required to make payments of war disablement pension in accordance with the certified level of disablement.

It was previously thought that a service-related noise induced hearing loss could intensify the effect of a subsequent hearing loss due to other causes such as aging. Authoritative medical opinion is now that such interaction does not occur and that the maximum effect of service-related hearing loss is at release from service. Medical officers must apply current medical opinion. For them to do otherwise would be unlawful.

It is estimated that, in 1997–98, some 10,000 claims by existing war pensioners for deterioration of their hearing loss, and about 1,000 new claimants may be affected by the change in medical opinion.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims have been made for industrial deafness from people employed or formerly employed in the mining industry; how many have been resolved; and how many are waiting for assessment. [8528]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

However, we estimate that as at 1 April 1995 there were more than 2,000 industrial injuries disablement pensions in payment for occupational deafness to people employed or formerly employed in the deep coal mining, opencast working and the manufacture of solid fuel industries.

Notes:

Information is based on a 10 per cent. sample with an allowance for late returns.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will reconsider his decision to remove the qualification which currently entitles those on severe disablement allowance to retain their benefit without further medical assessment; and if he will make a statement in respect of future qualifications. [8446]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: We propose to change the severe disablement allowance regulations to simplify the medical test arrangements by passporting those who satisfy the SDA 80 per cent. disablement test through the all-work test; and target resources on the severely disabled by limiting the criteria which passport people through the SDA 80 per cent. disablement test to those which are adequate measures of 80 per cent. disability.

These proposals were the subject of a recent Social Security Advisory Committee consultation exercise. I will provide a statement to Parliament in response to the forthcoming SSAC report in due course.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the estimated savings in his Department in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* future years as a result of the changes to reduced earnings allowance. [8705]

Mr. Roger Evans: Savings in 1997–98 and 1998–99 have been estimated at £35 million per year.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give a breakdown by location of those affected by amendments to regulations relating to the reduced earnings allowance. [8725]

Mr. Evans: The available information is set out in the table:

Reduced earnings allowance cases by area directorate

Area directorate	*Number of cases*
AD1—East London And Anglia	882
AD2—Chilterns	409
AD3—London South	1,984
AD4—West Country	890
AD5—Mercia	2,735
AD6—West Midlands	797
AD7—Wales	2,127
AD8—North West Coast	1,790
AD9—Greater Manchester	1,692
AD10—Yorkshire	2,046
AD11—Tyne Tees	4,470
AD12—West of Scotland	521
AD13—East of Scotland	1,209
Benefit Centres	76
Total	21,628

Source:
Benefits Agency: 100 per cent. count as at 31 October 1996 and subject to amendment.
Note:
Information relates to the amendment regulation that were introduced on 24 March 1996.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received about changes in the reduced earnings allowance. [8721]

Mr. Evans: As at 9 December, we had over the preceding six weeks received 12 representations from hon. Members and 14 from members of the public.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeals there have been to social security appeals tribunals against reductions in the reduced earnings allowance; what were the results of these appeals; how many appeals are to be considered by the Social Security Commissioners; by what date the appeals will be heard; and if he will make a statement. [8726]

Mr. Evans: The information regarding appeals to social security tribunals is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Since the amending regulations came into force from 24 March, there have been 24 appeals to Social Security Commissioners, 20 are from claimants and four from adjudication officers. It is not possible to say at this stage when the appeals will be heard.

Family Credit

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the annual cost of increasing the maintenance disregard for lone parents receiving family credit to *(a)* £20 per week, *(b)* £25 per week and *(c)* £30 per week and of the numbers who would gain in each case. [8870]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table.

Estimated cost of increasing the maintenance disregard in family credit for lone parents

1997–98

Weekly maintenance disregard (£)	*Additional net benefit costs (£ Million)*	*Number of gainers*
20	5	50,000
25	10	50,000
30	15	50,000

Estimates are rounded to the nearest £5 million.

Income Support (Lone Parents)

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the annual cost of introducing a maintenance disregard for lone parents on income support and of the numbers who would gain, at a weekly disregard level of *(a)* £5, *(b)* £10, *(c)* £15 and *(d)* £20. [8869]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: It is estimated that the cost of introducing a £5 maintenance disregard for lone parents in 1997–98 would be around £60 million; the cost of a £10 disregard would be around £100 million; the cost of a £15 disregard would be around £135 million; and the cost of a £20 disregard would be around £165 million. Some 240,000 lone parents would gain.

The annual cost of a disregard and number of lone parents who gained would increase over time as the Child Support Agency's caseload increased. There would also be increases in costs and numbers if the disregard were extended to parents with care who had repartnered. The estimates apply the disregard to child support maintenance and other forms of child maintenance.

Legislation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many items of legislation relating to his

	Per cent.
Department of the Environment	92.0
Lord Chancellor's Department	91.8
Overseas Development Admin.	91.6
Crown Office Scotland	91.5
Forestry Commission	91.1
Department of Health	89.3
Charity Commissioners	89.0
Serious Fraud Office	89.0
Department of Transport	87.8
Intervention Board	87.0
Cabinet Office	86.9
National Heritage	84.9
HM Customs and Excise	84.0
Office of Gas Supply	83.8
Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food	80.4

Paracetamol

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of deaths in the past seven years in which *(a)* paracetamol was the only drug involved and *(b)* paracetamol was one of the drugs involved. [7508]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 17 December 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many deaths over the past seven years resulted from (a) paracetamol as the only drug and (b) paracetamol as one of the drugs involved

The number of deaths associated with paracetamol reported to ONS over the past three years are shown in the attached table. The data for 1989 to 1992 are published, for each year separately, in Table 10 of Mortality statistics: injury and poisoning, England and Wales, series DH4, Nos. 16-18, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

The figures in brackets indicate the number of deaths with a mention of alcohol. These bracketed figures are already included in the unbracketed data and should not, therefore, be added to them.

Deaths from paracetamol in England and Wales 1993–95

	1993	1994	1995
Death by poisoning—accident			
Paracetamol only	44 (9)	40 (10)	41 (6)
Paracetamol with other drugs[1]	42 (18)	54 (16)	70 (21)
Total	86 (27)	94 (26)	111 (27)
Deaths by poisoning—suicide			
Paracetamol only	67 (7)	68 (5)	77 (2)
Paracetamol with other drugs[1]	169 (35)	144 (20)	162 (17)
Total	236 (42)	212 (25)	239 (19)
Deaths by poisoning—undetermined			
Paracetamol only	62 (6)	52 (5)	72 (1)
Paracetamol with other drugs[1]	68 (19)	95 (22)	146 (29)
Total	130 (25)	147 (27)	218 (30)

[1] These include deaths from paracetamol-containing compounds.

Aspirin

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many deaths have occurred, in the most recent five-year period for which statistics are available, as a result of the use of aspirin or aspirin-based products. [7500]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Paul Flynn, dated 17 December 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National statistics to your recent question on how many deaths occurred as a result of using aspirin or aspirin-based products.

The table below sets out the numbers of deaths which were certified as due to salicylates (aspirin and related compounds) in the years 1991 to 1995. It includes deaths due to poisoning[1], and to adverse effects[2] of salicylates in normal use as underlying or secondary cause of death.

Deaths from Salicylates in England and Wales, 1991–95

Year	Poisoning	Adverse effects
1991	51	4
1992	46	1
1993	46	4
1994	36	2
1995	31	6

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision code 965.1
[2] International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision code E935.1

Hypothermia

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pensioners have died in each year since 1992 as a result of hypothermia *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in the west midlands; and what was the percentage change from the previous year in each case. [7694]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the chief executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 17 December 1996:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many pensioners died as a result of hypothermia *(a)* nationally *(b)* in the West Midlands; and the percentage change from the previous year.

The figures are shown in the table below.

Numbers of deaths with a mention of hypothermia in males aged 65 years and over and females aged 60 years and over

Year	England and Wales	Percentage change	West Midlands[1]	Percentage change
1992	282	–34	28	–49
1993	352	25	38	36
1994	291	–17	31	–18
1995	287	–1	36	16

1. International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision, code 991.6.
[1] Health Region of residence.

Fixed Capital Formation

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors underlie his forecast in table 3.3 of the Red Book about growth in 1997 of gross domestic fixed capital formation in private dwellings and land. [8278]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* Housing investment is expected to respond to the recovery in the housing market. This recovery is now well established. In the third quarter of this year the number of mortgage loans approved by banks and building societies was up by 28 per cent. on a year earlier, and in the three months to October turnover—as measured by particulars delivered at the Land Registry—was up by 19 per cent. on a year earlier. House prices in November were more than 7 per cent. higher than a year earlier. Housing starts have picked up in recent months, and this should be reflected in rising housing investment in 1997.

Self-assessment

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* how much has been spent on advertising and *(b)* how many inquiries have been received regarding the introduction of self-assessment; and in each case what were his initial estimates. [8274]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* So far, £13,365,724 has been spent on advertising and publicity support material for the self-assessment public information campaign. In total 368,563 people have sought further information by telephoning the information line, or by sending a in a coupon for press advertising. Initial estimates for the campaign budget were £25 million over three years and we remain within that budget. The number of responses to the information line have been three times greater than was originally estimated.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8551]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* The Chancellor's Departments and agencies appointed 13 individuals to public positions in the last year from names first identified by the public appointments unit.

Income Tax (Personal Allowance)

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost of increasing personal allowance on income tax to *(a)* £4,000, *(b)* £5,000, *(c)* £6,000, *(d)* £7,000 and *(e)* £8,000 in Scotland based on 1996–97 prices for each year from 1996–97 to 1999–2000; and in each case how many taxpayers would be removed from income tax altogether. [9079]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 13 December 1996]:* It is not possible to provide a reliable breakdown below United Kingdom level for 1996–97. The latest available information is for 1994–95. The full-year cost of increasing the non-aged personal allowance in Scotland under the 1994–95 tax regime and at 1994–95 income levels is given in the table below. The numbers of taxpayers removed from income tax are also shown.

Increase non-aged personal allowance in Scotland from £3,445 to:	*Full year cost (£ million)*	*Number of taxpayers taken out of income tax (thousands)*
£4,000	290	100
£5,000	770	260
£6,000	1,200	400
£7,000	1,700	540
£8,000	2,100	710

Inflation

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the annual rate of inflation in April of (i) 1993, (ii) 1994, (iii) 1995 and (iv) 1996. [9133]

Mrs. Angela Knight *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* The annual rate of inflation—measured by the retail prices index excluding mortgage interest payments—in April 1993, 1994, 1995 and 1996 was 2.9 per cent. 2.3 per cent. 2.6 per cent. and 2.9 per cent. respectively.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) which of the projects in the list entitled "Agreed Private Finance Initiative Projects" as of 26 November 1996, issued by the private finance unit, are signed projects; [9327]

(2) if he will make a statement on *(a)* the cash sum attached to and *(b)* the projected duration of each project in the list entitled, "Agreed Private Finance Initiative Projects" as of 26 November 1996, issued by the private finance unit; [9329]

(3) if he will place a copy of the list entitled "Agreed Private Finance Initiative Projects" as of 26 November 1996, issued by the private finance unit, in the Library; and if he will place updated lists in the Library on a monthly basis; [9328]

(4) to whom *(a)* the list, "Agreed Private Finance Initiative Projects" as of 26 November 1996, issued by private finance unit, and *(b)* predecessor versions of the list have been issued; and if he will place a copy of the list in the Library. [9326]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* Of the projects listed in the document dated 26 November, Departments advised the Treasury that those which are signed are as follows;

Signed

Dartford Bridge
Second Severn Bridge
Skye Bridge
Heathrow Express
Royal Armouries
NIRS2
Northern Line Trains
Greenwich Accommodation
LISA IT project
Bridgend Prison
CTRL
A69

Parliament; and what is his latest calculation of the total cost of the last state opening. [8001]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* Expenditure on the state opening of Parliament properly reflects the nature of the occasion. The deployment of police officers to maintain public order on the route of the procession is an operational matter for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

On the cost of the last state opening, I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 11 November, *Official Report*, column *32*, and to the answers given by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, 19 November, *Official Report*, column *504* and by my right hon. Friend, the Minister of State, Home Office, 16 December, *Official Report*, column *450*.

ENVIRONMENT

Household Growth

13. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on household growth. [7863]

Mr. Gummer: The latest projections for England show a rise in the number of households—by up to 4.4 million over a 25-year period up to 2016. I am determined to ensure that the maximum number of these are accommodated on land that has already been used—particularly in our city centres.

Local Government Finance

15. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the local authority financial settlement for 1997–98. [7865]

29. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact of the Budget settlement upon local authorities in England. [7879]

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made to the House on 27 November, *Official Report*, columns *337–42*.

23. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received in respect of the standard spending assessment for Essex county council and Basildon district council. [7873]

Sir Paul Beresford: We have one representation from Essex county council about pupil numbers. We have not received any representations from Basildon district council on the provisional local government finance settlement for 1997–98.

28. **Sir Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the extent to which the present formula for deriving standard spending assessments reflects accurately the differing costs of providing services in sparsely populated rural areas and areas of urban density. [7878]

Sir Paul Beresford: The research we commissioned into sparsity and local authority costs found that the size of the current allowance for sparsity in standard spending assessments is about right.

Research into density concluded that other measures of urbanness might also be relevant, but that further study would be needed.

For 1997–98, we therefore propose no changes in the basis of the sparsity and density allowances.

30. **Mr. Pearson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received following his statement on the local authority finance settlement for England in 1997–98. [7880]

Mr. Curry: Following my right hon. Friend's announcement on 27 November, authorities have until 3 January 1997 to make written representations on the 1997–98 settlement. We have received 45 written representations so far.

Business Rate

17. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact on rural East Anglia of proposals to reduce business rates for village shops. [7867]

Mr. Curry: We consulted widely on our proposals for a village shop rate relief scheme; local authorities in East Anglia welcomed the proposals as a positive measure to help rural communities in the region.

Council Housing (Central Heating)

18. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to provide resources to each local authority to install central heating in each council dwelling built before 1974. [7868]

Mr. Clappison: At the time of the 1991 English house condition survey, 73 per cent. of local authority properties built before 1974 had central heating. Local authorities receive allocations from the Government each year through the housing investment programme and other programmes. It is for them to decide how best to use these locally-determined priorities.

Planning Policy

19. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the preservation of public open space and green belt land in Greater London. [7869]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Government remain committed to the preservation of green belt and open space land in London, as demonstrated in the recent publication of the housing Green Paper and revised strategic guidance for London planning authorities issued earlier this year.

Planning System

20. **Sir Michael Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the

practice of developers of paying the relevant local planning authority to conduct public opinion surveys in order to gauge the likely reaction of residents in surrounding areas to their proposed development; and what assessment he has made as to whether such payments detract from the independence of the planning system. [7870]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: There is no reason why developers should not pay all or part of any cost involved in procuring public opinion surveys, if that is relevant to the consideration of a planning application. The value of such an arrangement would be dependent on the professionalism with which the survey was conducted and the integrity of the local authority involved.

Greenhouse Gases

21. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the number of countries which will meet their current commitments on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. [7871]

Mr. Gummer: All developed countries are committed, under the framework convention on climate change, to aim to return their emissions of greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2000.

It seems that three European Union countries, including the United Kingdom, are currently on course to meet this commitment.

Unified Business Rate

22. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about unified business rates for small businesses in areas affected by out-of-town shopping development. [7872]

Mr. Curry: I have received a number of such representations.

Computers (Millennium Date Change)

24. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the millennium compliance of his Department's computer systems and of those in local government, together with those with which they are connected; and if he will make a statement. [7874]

Mr. Gummer: My Department is aware of the potential problems to departmental systems that may be caused by the millennium date change.

The Department is a member of the public sector year 2000 group and is currently undertaking a study which will produce a year 2000 compliance audited inventory of systems, which will form the basis of a costed departmental year 2000 programme.

It is for individual local authorities to assess for themselves the millennium compliance of their computer systems and take whatever action they consider necessary.

Ferris Wheel, South Bank

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received asking him to call in the application for a ferris wheel on the south bank. [7875]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend received 25 representations asking him to call in the proposed ferris wheel. When the application was referred to my right hon. Friend as a departure from Lambeth's development plan, the council provided copies of over 100 representations it had received. By a large majority, these were in support of the proposal. My right hon. Friend considered all these representations very carefully before deciding not to call in the planning application.

City Challenge Partnerships

26. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress being made by the city challenge partnerships. [7876]

Mr. Curry: Annual reports, reflecting the performance of all 31 city challenge partnerships during 1995–96, were received during the summer. The reports are very encouraging and show that city challenge is having a significant impact in regenerating some of the worst areas of urban deprivation.

The annual reports record outputs achieved in 1995–96 through each of the 31 city challenge partnerships programmes. The aggregated achievements were:

Over 26,000 dwellings were completed or improved (21 per cent. above target);

Over 35,200 jobs were created or preserved (16 per cent. above target);

Over 900 hectares of land were reclaimed or improved (4 per cent. above target);

Over 700,000 sq m of new or improved business and commercial floorspace was provided (3 per cent. below target);

Over 2,100 business start-ups (13 per cent. above target).

Over £1 billion of city challenge funding is expected to attract over £4.7 billion of private sector leverage over the lifetime of the initiative.

An independent study by a team from Liverpool John Moores university, the city challenge interim national evaluation, published by my Department in November. concluded that city challenge

"is the most promising urban regeneration scheme so far attempted".

Building Research Establishment

27. **Mrs. Wise:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of the Building Research Establishment. [7877]

Mr. Clappison: We have announced that we propose to privatise BRE by February 1997, and are on course to do so.

Car Parking

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to promote better management of car parking in town and city centres. [7864]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I am keen to see better management of car parking in town centres. Our planning guidance on town centres emphasises the importance of a coherent town centre parking strategy in maintaining urban vitality. My Department also supports the Association for Town Centre Management in its role in encouraging good practice.

Green-field Sites

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received from house builders about the need to use green-field sites; and if he will make a statement. [7866]

Mr. Gummer: I have received one letter from the House Builders Federation. I also discussed this issue, among many others, at the federation's annual lunch last week.

"New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans"

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what costs quoted in the document, "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans", were prepared in his Department; what detailed assumptions and interpretations were provided to officials in his Department to enable preparation of each cost; and what was the total cost to public funds of preparing each estimate. [6349]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department of the Environment, in conjunction with the Treasury, prepared factual material relating to costings published in "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" numbered 18 to 24. The detailed assumptions and interpretations that were provided to departmental officials are set out in my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary's reply to the right hon. Gentleman today. It is not the normal working practice to keep a record of the time spent in providing factual information to Ministers and it is not therefore possible to offer a reliable estimate of the costs involved.

West Midlands Police

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the non-council tax funding made available to the West Midlands police in 1996–97; what it will be in 1997–98; and what is the percentage difference between these two figures; [9016]

(2) what was the spending cap for the West Midlands police authority in 1996–97; what it will be in 1997–98; and what is the percentage difference between these two figures. [9017]

Sir Paul Beresford: The information requested is as follows:

	1996–97 £ million	*Provisional 1997–98 £ million*	*Percentage increase*
Non-council tax funding of budget requirement[1]	309.017	314.391	1.7
Other grants[2]—Police specific grant, Additional Rule 2	0.991	2.965	
Total non-council tax funding	310.008	317.356	2.4
Maximum budget requirement under proposed capping criteria	343.218	354.201	3.2

[1] Comprises revenue support grant, redistributed non-domestic rates, and principal formula police specific grant, which together represent the amount of Exchequer funding in support of the authority's budget requirement.

[2] Excluding certain capital financing grants, totalling £1.359 million in 1996–97; the figure for these grants in 1997–98 is not yet available.

Farmland Birds (Decline)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 27 November on the song thrush, if he will list the research projects into the causes and possible solutions to the decline in farmland birds to which he was referring. [8013]

Mr. Clappison: Research dealing with the possible relationship between farming practices over the last 20 years and population of farmland birds is listed in the table. All the research is funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Contractor	*Project title*
Institute of Terrestrial Ecology/ADAS	Field survey and experimentation; the effects of water regime on bird and invertebrate populations
Game Conservancy Trust	Arable reversions to permanent grassland; determining best management options to benefit declining bird populations
British Trust for Ornithology/Institute of Terrestrial Ecology/Central Science Laboratory	Effects of agricultural management on farmland birds
Oxford University/British Trust for Ornithology	The effects of agricultural change on bird populations
Central Science Laboratory	Assessment of the effects of seed treatments on birds feeding in orchards
Central Science Laboratory	Improving the assessment of pesticides risks to birds in orchards
Central Science Laboratory	Strategic monitoring and modelling of woodpigeon populations to predict damage and the implication of agricultural change
Ecoscope Applied Ecologists	Enhancement of farm woodlands for birds

Permaculture

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *525*, on a definition of permaculture, what non-statutory definitions of permaculture are employed by his Department in its dealings with other bodies. [9213]

Sir Paul Beresford: The new shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines "permaculture" as

"An agricultural ecosystem intended to be complete and self-sustaining".

Legislation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many items of legislation relating to his Department have been repealed since January 1994; how many statutory instruments were introduced during the same period; and how many of the latter were *(a)* deregulatory and *(b)* fee orders. [9360]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster earlier today.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to make announcements regarding the single regeneration budget bid from North Lincolnshire council. [9612]

Sir Paul Beresford: The announcement was made yesterday. The bid submitted by North Lincolnshire council on behalf of the Barton Upon Humber regeneration partnership has been awarded £1.6 million SRB challenge fund support. A copy of the announcement is in the House of Commons Library.

Technetium

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking with respect to reports of increased levels of technetium (TC-99) in seafood collected along the Cumbrian coast; and if he will make a statement. [9656]

Mr. Clappison: All discharges from Sellafield to the Irish sea, including technetium-99, are regulated by means of authorisations granted by the Environment Agency.

British Nuclear Fuels has applied to the agency for a 25 per cent. reduction in the authorised discharge limits for technetium-99 from Sellafield, lowering it from 200 terabecquerels per year to 150 TBq per year. In addition, the company proposes to set as an internal working target an average discharge of 100 TBq per year.

The proposed reduction in the limit is contained in an application to the Environment Agency for a variation to the certificate of authorisation under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 to dispose of liquid waste from premises on the Sellafield site. Proposals by the Environment Agency to vary the authorisation will be the subject of public consultation.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what regulations govern the collection and environmentally safe disposal of *(a)* nicad rechargeable batteries, *(b)* fluorescent light bulbs and strip lights and *(c)* oil-based surplus paints and white spirit from (i) households and (ii) industrial and commercial premises. [9575]

Mr. Clappison: Waste from household, industrial and commercial premises must be managed and disposed of in accordance with sections 33 and 34 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Although it will depend on the product and the use to which it has been put, most surplus oil-based paints and white spirits from industrial and commercial premises will be subject to additional controls set out in the Special Waste Regulations 1996. Waste nickel cadmium—Ni-Cd—rechargeable batteries from industrial and commercial premises are also subject to these regulations, under which all movements of "special waste" are tracked by a system of consignment notes to ensure that they reach an appropriate waste management facility. Waste fluorescent tubes from industrial and commercial premises are not special waste, but their movements are subject to the requirements of the duty of care under section 34 of the 1990 Act. The waste management licensing system is also designed to ensure that the recovery or disposal of controlled wastes—including fluorescent tubes—is carried out in a manner that does not harm human health or cause environmental damage. Under section 45 of the 1990 Act, responsibility for the collection of all these wastes from household premises lies with local authorities.

Ni-Cd rechargeable batteries are also covered by the EC batteries directive—(91/157)—which requires them to be marked with a separate collection symbol for the purposes of recycling or controlled disposal. The battery and electrical appliance industries have set up a working group which has formulated a strategy aimed at increasing the number Ni-Cd batteries being collected and recycled.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made by Government Departments towards the target of improving energy efficiency by 15 per cent. in the five years ended March 1996. [9856]

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Government's energy efficiency record has improved by just over 14.5 per cent.; very close to the 15 per cent. target we set five years ago. This is an important achievement and reflects much effort and commitment by the staff concerned. I am particularly pleased to draw attention to the very good results achieved on the Ministry of Defence estate. Full details are shown in the following tables.

Energy management in individual Government Departments is a matter for those Departments. Comparisons between Departments need to be treated with care since their estates and activities vary considerably. There have been greater pressures on electricity use, resulting in particular from the growth in use of IT equipment: some very large increases in electricity usage are due to moving a dominant HQ building from naturally ventilated premises to air-conditioned ones. This is in line with trends in the economy as a whole as part of the process of improving productivity.

I am delighted my own Department has been able to exceed the 15 per cent. target, with even more impressive progress having been made towards reducing emissions of carbon dioxide, down by 26 per cent. since 1990–91.

Energy efficiency has been an important consideration in the design of the Department's new headquarters buildings, both of which are expected to be classified as "very good" under the Building Research Establishment environment assessment method—BREEAM.

While these figures are encouraging, we must build on this success. Green Ministers have now agreed a further energy saving target of 20 per cent. by 2000, on the 1990–91 base year, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has given this his personal support. Further savings will be challenging, but I remain determined that the Government should set an example and contribute to the reductions we need in meeting our climate change commitments.

Table 1: Government estate—energy efficiency performance[1]

Civil Departments, including Agencies	*Energy expenditure*[2] £		*Own investment in energy efficiency*[2] £		*Percentage reduction relative to 1990–91*[3] *(positive figures represent per cent. improvement) Total cost at standard prices adjusted for estate and weather changes*				
	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
MAFF[4]	2,401,478	2,316,723	300,000	500,000	–1	3	–4	–2	1
MAFF—Laboratories	1,443,570	1,346,279	350,000	330,000	–12	–19	–24	–29	–24
Cabinet Office	501,068	499,165	5,000	325,000	–14	0	5	9	15
Customs and Excise	2,939,700	3,046,638	400,000	300,000	2	14	10	14	20
Education and[5]	507,707	536,235	12,000	45,700	–20	–82	–95	–96	–85
Employment[3]	10,169,274	8,840,211	1,227,318	1,132,524	–1	–4	–2	8	4
Environment	1,536,159	1,375,987	150,335	87,116	8	13	9	14	16
Environment—QEIICC[6]	457,126	464,473	0	0	–17	–16	–14	–8	–6
FCO	959,281	834,208	117,402	30,000	–3	7	–9	–10	–14
Health[7]	1,037,544	801,192	20,000	117,000	–13	0	–98	–83	–54
Home Office	2,262,665	2,012,161	0	0	–8	–8	–8	–7	–2
Home Office—Prisons	26,950.553	18,141,743	1,500,000	1,200,000	2	–4	–3	–8	0
Inland Revenue	11,251.064	9,054,230	363,500	567,744	1	2	6	12	16
Lord Chancellor's Department[3]	5,848,176	5,889,680	2,050,500	0	–1	2	8	8	11
ODA[8]	428,999	372,396	0	158,000	—	–4	0	3	11
National Heritage[9]	78,667	75,414	0	1,000	—	—	—	—	–7
National Savings	1,350,214	1,043,471	933,182	951,717	3	8	12	17	19
Northern Ireland	9,306,333	11,107,276	838,500	870,000	1	2	5	9	13
Scottish Office[4]	1,101,890	1,139,914	37,400	60,000	—	–6	–8	–12	–18
Scottish Court Service[5]	913,405	755,401	150,000	80,000	—	2	5	18	33
Scottish Prison Service	2,780,847	2,424,377	0	372,690	–1	0	4	7	7
Social Security[10]	15,226,030	14,236,000	1,234,700	1,000,000	–1	–1	–4	–1	3
Trade and Industry	4,599,088	4,130,682	0	0	5	5	0	5	14
Transport[11]	2,983,437	2,940,057	313,300	235,205	7	8	12	17	15
Treasury	286,227	233,199	2,689	1,855	8	4	–9	0	5
Welsh Office	513,711	543,700	27,693	11,933	1	2	2	4	3
Total	107,834,213	94,160,812	10,033,519	8,377,484	0.5	–0.3	–0.4	1.3	5.9

Table 2: Government estate—energy efficiency performance[1]

Civil Departments, including Agencies	*Performance against energy and cost indicators, relative to 1990–91 (positive figures represent per cent. progress) Adjusted for estate and weather changes*										*Adjusted for weather changes only*	
	Fossil fuel		*Electricity*		*Total kWh*		*Total cost*		CO_2		*Total* CO_2	
	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
FF	17	29	–14	–15	9	17	–2	1	0	4	1	2
MAFF–Laboratories	–9	7	–41	–44	–17	–6	–29	–24	–23	–9	–36	–21
Cabinet Office	6	39	10	–1	7	29	9	15	10	20	–8	–6
Customs and Excise	25	48	12	13	19	32	14	20	17	25	–24	–12
Education and	–15	–29	–122	–104	–57	–58	–96	–85	–78	–69	–21	–16
Employment	21	19	1	0	15	12	8	4	9	5	–8	–2
Environment	31	40	2	0	24	31	14	16	23	26	21	25
Environment—QEII CC	–76	–52	0	–1	–28	–19	–8	–6	–10	–7	–10	–7
FCO	20	23	–19	–26	4	3	–10	–14	–8	–10	0	–1
Health	4	33	–112	–84	–40	–11	–83	–54	–67	–40	–73	–21
Home Office	–2	5	–9	–5	–4	2	–7	–2	–5	0	–6	3
Home Office—Prisons	2	12	–24	–18	–1	9	–8	0	1	10	–12	–2
Inland Revenue	17	23	10	13	14	19	12	16	14	18	19	23
Lord Chancellor's Department	24	29	0	2	17	21	8	11	11	14	–3	–2
ODA[2]	–16	–8	9	17	–7	1	3	11	2	10	1	9
National Heritage[2]	—	–11	—	–6	—	–9	—	–7	—	–7	—	–7
National Savings	21	18	17	19	19	19	17	19	18	19	18	21
Northern Ireland	14	18	8	11	12	15	9	13	10	24	–4	12
Scottish Office[2]	7	18	–23	–39	–1	3	–12	–18	–8	–8	0	–7
Scottish Courts[2]	20	39	16	30	19	36	18	33	18	34	–3	14
Scottish Prison Service	12	15	–2	–6	10	13	7	7	10	10	5	5
Social Security	23	26	–15	–9	12	16	–1	3	2	7	–15	–9
Trade and Industry	34	47	–6	1	20	31	5	14	10	19	32	39
Transport	30	32	13	10	24	24	17	15	20	18	41	39
Treasury	–2	16	1	0	–1	11	0	5	4	10	22	30
Welsh Office	17	38	1	–6	10	18	4	3	7	7	23	17
Total	12.1	19.7	–5.6	–2.9	7.8	14.1	1.3	5.9	5.6	11.8	–1.8	5.7

* Base year is not 1990–91. Agreed base year therefore used for the purposes of these calculations.

Table 3: Government estate—energy efficiency performance[12, 13]

Ministry of Defence

Performance against energy and cost indicators, relative to 1990–91 (positive figures represent per cent. progress)

	Adjusted for estate and weather changes										*Adjusted for weather changes only*	
	Fossil fuel		*Electricity*		*Total kWh*		*Total cost*		*CO_2*		*Total CO_2*	
	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Civil	15	25	11	1	13	17	12	8	12	11	–7	–8
Navy	14	25	33	36	18	28	25	32	26	34	13	21
Army	11	17	18	20	13	17	15	18	16	21	16	25
RAF	13	23	10	9	12	20	11	15	12	17	21	25
Procurement Executive	n/a	23	n/a	21	n/a	22	n/a	22	n/a	22	n/a	22
DERA	10	17	0	3	7	10	5	6	6	7	6	7
Total	12.4	20.3	16.6	17.9	13.3	19.8	14.7	18.9	15.9	21.1	16.0	23.0

Table 4: Government estate—energy efficiency performance

Entire Government estate

Performance against energy and cost indicators, relative to 1990–91 (positive figures represent per cent. progress)

	Adjusted for estate and weather changes										*Adjusted for weather changes only*	
	Fossil fuel		*Electricity*		*Total kWh*		*Total cost*		*CO_2*		*Total CO_2*	
	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Civil Departments	12.1	19.7	–5.6	–2.9	7.8	14.1	1.3	5.9	5.6	11.8	–1.8	5.7
MOD	12.4	20.3	16.6	17.9	13.3	19.8	14.7	18.9	15.9	21.1	16.0	23.0
Total	12.3	20.1	9.4	11.1	11.6	18.1	10.4	4.8	12.7	18.2	10.4	17.6

*Some Departments have a different base year to 1990–91. The agreed base year has been used for the purposes of this table, where appropriate.

Table 5: Government estate—energy and cost indicators

Civil Departments including Agencies

	Energy indicator						*Cost indicator*					
	Fossil fuel k Wh/m2			*Electricity k Wh/m2*			*Fossil fuel £/m2*			*Electricity £/m2*		
	1990–91	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1990–91*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1990–91*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1990–91*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
MAFF	292	244	209	103	117	119	3.65	3.05	2.61	6.17	7.02	7.12
MAFF—Laboratories	715	779	665	237	335	340	8.94	9.74	8.32	14.21	20.08	20.42
Cabinet Office	290	271	176	94	85	95	3.62	3.39	2.20	5.65	5.07	5.68
Customs and Excise	161	121	84	130	115	113	2.01	1.51	1.05	7.80	6.90	6.78
Education and	149	171	192	96	214	196	1.86	2.14	2.40	5.76	12.81	11.73
Employment	210	166	169	91	89	94	2.62	2.08	2.24	5.44	5.36	5.67
Environment	282	194	169	87	86	88	3.53	2.43	2.11	5.23	5.13	5.25
Environment—QEII CC	153	269	233	270	271	272	1.91	3.37	2.91	16.21	16.28	16.30
FCO	217	173	167	145	173	183	2.71	2.16	2.09	8.71	10.41	10.97
Health	174	167	116	107	227	197	2.17	2.08	1.45	6.42	13.60	11.82
Home Office	312	318	297	136	149	143	3.90	3.98	3.71	8.18	8.91	8.58
Home Office Prisons	508	497	446	69	86	82	6.36	6.21	5.57	4.15	5.15	4.89
Inland Revenue	166	138	127	105	95	92	2.08	1.72	1.59	6.33	5.68	5.51
Lord Chancellor's Department	255	195	181	107	107	105	3.19	2.44	2.26	6.42	6.42	6.31
ODA[1]	381	444	411	220	200	182	4.77	5.55	5.14	13.23	11.98	10.92
National Heritage[1]	156	156	174	141	141	150	1.96	1.96	2.18	8.48	8.48	8.99
National Savings	191	151	156	208	173	168	2.39	1.88	1.96	12.49	10.40	10.10
Northern Ireland	234	202	193	109	101	97	2.92	2.52	2.41	6.53	6.04	5.84
Scottish Office[1]	258	239	211	91	112	126	3.22	2.99	2.63	5.45	6.71	7.57
Scottish Courts[1]	163	130	100	64	54	45	2.03	1.62	1.25	3.86	3.24	2.70
Scottish Prison Service	533	470	451	67	68	72	6.67	5.87	5.64	4.04	4.10	4.29
Social Security	278	215	207	103	119	113	3.48	2.69	2.59	6.20	7.12	6.76
Trade and Industry	372	246	198	196	208	194	4.65	3.07	2.47	11.77	12.48	11.63
Transport	196	137	134	114	100	103	2.45	1.72	1.68	6.84	5.98	6.18
Treasury	246	250	207	107	105	107	3.08	3.12	2.59	6.40	6.32	6.40
Welsh Office	158	131	98	126	125	133	1.97	1.64	1.22	7.55	7.48	8.00
Total	311	274	250	101	107	104	3.89	3.42	3.13	6.07	6.41	6.25

* Base year is not 1990–91. Agreed base year therefore used for the purposes of these calculations.

[1]Progress is expressed as a percentage relative to the 1990–91 base year value of the performance indicator in question. Positive figures represent improvement. The standard indicator, against which the target to improve energy efficiency by 15 per cent. by 31 March 1996 is measured, is obtained by weather-correcting energy consumption and converting to costs using "standard prices" for fuel (6p/kWh for electricity and 1.25p/kWh for all fossil fuels) then dividing by floor area. Conversion to money both reflects the relative costs of electricity and fossil fuel and their environmental impact, and the use of fixed prices eliminates the effects of tariff changes which distort the comparison of fuel bills. In August 1995 a report was provided for the Environment Select Committee which gave more detailed background on the energy efficiency initiative and on the indicators used.

[2] Although figures have been prepared on a consistent basis, caution should be exercised in comparing the energy use of different Departments and Agencies because of differences in their estate and the nature of their work. For example, the operational needs of prisons and the QEII Conference Centre mean that they have a pattern of energy use which is different from that of a Department which has predominantly office accommodation. Expenditure on energy and investment figures are included for information only. Investment figures relate to clearly identifiable energy efficiency measures undertaken by Departments. Energy efficiency is an integral part of all major construction projects, including building refurbishment and plant replacement; for example, the investment figure for the Lord Chancellor's Department is an estimate, a large proportion of which is accounted for by works justified on operational grounds and does not reflect specifically the proportion of works attributed to energy efficiency.

[3] The average performance figure for the civil estate cannot be derived by simply adding together the individual Departmental progress and dividing by the number of Departments because this does not allow for the large variations in consumption. The correct figure is obtained by calculating the value of the performance indicator for the year in question and the base year, for the civil estate as a whole, and calculating the reduction relative to the base year.

[4] Energy performance is improving despite the addition of new buildings, major refurbishment of specialised buildings, continued growth in the use of information technology, the business led demands of Agencies and longer working hours. Depots have been removed from the reporting mechanism.

[5] For consistency with earlier years of the energy efficiency initiative, the Departments of Education and Employment have been reported separately, in the format prior to the formation of the DFEE. Figures for ACAS (now part of DTI) and HSE (now part of DOE) have been included with those for Employment Department and Employment Service.

[6] QEII Conference Centre is reported separately because of its business led demands.

[7] Since the beginning of the initiative the Department of Health estate has reduced from a large number of naturally ventilated buildings to five densely occupied, mainly air-conditioned, buildings with consequent substantial savings of rent and CILOR. Only 17 per cent. of the Department's 1990–91 estate remains on the current portfolio and comparisons between the 1990 data and current performance are therefore unreliable and do not reflect the real improvements achieved.

[8] Base year is 1991–92.

[9] Base year is 1994–95 by which time energy efficient lighting and other improvements already installed. Increased Information Technology, and also constant air conditioning during 1995's hot summer months.

[10] Workload is increasing, affecting occupancy and requiring offices to be occupied for longer, increasing the use of energy. Greater use of information technology, expansion of the use of air conditioning and the upgrading of lighting levels has increased electricity consumption.

[11] Figures exclude the Vehicle Inspectorate Agency. Own investment in energy efficiency advised as 8 per cent.

[12] The Ministry of Defence (MOD) estate is different from the rest of the Government estate, and has been undergoing more radical changes. It is therefore treated in a slightly different way. In common with the civil estate, it has greatly increased its use of information technology. Full data for the years between 1990–91 and 1993–94 are not available, so the table shows the results for 1994–95 and 1995–96.

[13] Floor area cannot be calculated for the majority of the MOD estate. However, to enable comparisons with data for the civil estate which is adjusted for changes in floor area, a proxy has been used. Changes in consumption arising from estate changes have been estimated as a result of estate adjustments, with appropriate adjustments made to the gross data for the years following the change. In common with other Departments, the MOD has a target to achieve a 15 per cent. improvement by 31 March 1996. Positive figures represent improvement.

Granny Annexes (Council Tax)

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the assessment of granny annexes for council tax purposes. [9857]

Mr. Gummer: Under current legislation, if a building or part of a building, such as a granny annex, is a self-contained unit of living accommodation, then it is assessed for council tax purposes as a separate dwelling.

In some circumstances, this means that families whose dependent relatives live with them may face two council tax bills, one for each part of their property.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I now propose to amend these rules, so that in future a self-contained unit within a single property will not be treated as a separate dwelling if it is occupied by an elderly or disabled member of the family living in the rest of the property. This will relieve the burden which presently falls on some families who have chosen to provide support for close family members under the same roof with a measure of independence.

Departmental Cash Limits

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to change his Department's cash limits for 1996–97. [9947]

Mr. Curry: The DOE/LACAP (local authority capital) non-voted cash limit will be increased by £3,529,000 from £1,741,558,000 to £1,745,087,000. The increase is due to the take-up of end-year flexibility for supplementary credit approvals to local authorities to enable funding of additional cash incentive scheme grants. The EYF entitlement of £4,105,000 announced by the Chief Secretary on 12 July 1996—*Official Report,* columns *327–28*—was subsequently recalculated following revised forecast outturn data. The increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Local Government Commission

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his response to the recommendations from the Local Government Commission following its recent reviews of Blackburn, Blackpool, Halton, Medway Towns, Peterborough, The Wrekin, Thurrock and Warrington. [9948]

Mr. Curry: The Local Government Commission has made recommendations for changes to the district warding arrangements in all eight areas that it has reviewed. It has also made some recommendations for changes to parish boundaries and parish electoral arrangements.

I have decided to accept all of the Commission's recommendations. It is important that the process for making local authority electoral arrangements should be seen to be fully independent. For this reason, it is the Government's intention not to modify the substance of electoral recommendations from the Local Government Commission.

My Department will be consulting on draft orders so that these recommendations can be implemented in time for the elections to the future unitary councils on 1 May 1997.

Sulphur Protocol

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a strategy for meeting the United Kingdom's commitments under the second sulphur protocol of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe; and if he will make a statement. [10278]

Mr. Gummer: I am pleased to announce that the United Kingdom has today ratified the UNECE second sulphur protocol. We are among the first handful of countries to do so. Achievement of the emission reduction targets in the protocol will mean even better protection for our sensitive ecosystems, forests, lakes and buildings, as well as benefits for our continental European neighbours. It will also lead to substantial improvements in the quality of the air we breathe which will be good for asthma sufferers and for everyone who has breathing problems.

The protocol needs ratification by 16 countries to become fully effective. So far 28 countries have signed it but only five, including now the United Kingdom, have ratified. It is clearly important that all those who have signed the protocol should now ratify it. Only by concerted action across the whole of Europe shall we deal effectively with the problem of acid rain.

Our commitment is to reducing emission of sulphur dioxide by 80 per cent. by 2010 compared with 1980 levels. I am publishing today a national strategy setting out how this will be achieved.

The figures for 1995 reveal that emissions from the major sources—power stations, refineries and large industrial boilers and furnaces—have been reduced by 55 per cent. since 1980. This shows that we have already made enormous strides in tackling acid rain.

We have buried the old myth that Britain is the dirty man of Europe. It never was true. Our policies on this, and on the whole range of environmental matters, show how serious is this country's commitment to the environment. We have a record of which we can be rightly proud.

I am pleased to announce also that changes have been made to the national plan which gives effect in the United Kingdom to the requirements of the European Community large combustion plant directive. The aim of these changes, which were widely welcomed by those who commented on the consultation proposals issued in the summer, is to ensure that future allocations of emissions quota for both sulphur dioxide and oxides of nitrogen under the national plan are more closely in line with regulatory consents under integrated pollution control.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Legislation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many items of legislation relating to his Department have been repealed since January 1994; how many statutory instruments were introduced during the same period; and how many of the latter were *(a)* deregulatory and *(b)* fee orders. [9366]

Mr. Ancram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her by my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Bates) earlier today.

Prednisolone

Mr. Flynn: to ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate how many people *(a)* have been prescribed and *(b)* took the steroid prednisolone in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9604]

Mr. Moss: It is not possible to identify the number of patients who were prescribed or took prednisolone. Data collected cover only the number of prescriptions dispensed in Northern Ireland, and not how many patients were prescribed any medicinal product.

Hospital Admissions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate *(a)* how many and *(b)* the percentage of people who have been admitted to hospital as a direct result of complications after (i) surgery and (ii) medicinal treatment in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9605]

Mr. Moss: The information is not available centrally.

Care in the Community

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate *(a)* how many and *(b)* the percentage of diagnosed mentally ill who are currently receiving care in the community; and if he will make a statement. [9611]

Mr. Moss: It is estimated that over 100,000 people seen by GPs each year are diagnosed as having some form of mental illness. Over 99 per cent. receive treatment in the community. Mental health is a key area in the "Government's Regional Strategy for Health and Social Wellbeing 1997–2002".

General Practitioners

Dr. Hendron: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what are the building cost location factors for general medical practitioners in Northern Ireland; [9684]

(2) for what reasons the building cost location factor for general medical practitioners in Northern Ireland is lower than the factors for England and Wales; [9685]

(3) when the last review was undertaken of building cost location factors for general medical practitioners in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* the United Kingdom; [9686]

(4) what plans he has to bring the building cost location factor for general medical practitioners in Northern Ireland into line with that for England and Wales. [9687]

Mr. Moss: Responsibility for the subjects in this question has been delegated to the Health Estates under its chief executive, Mr. R. H. Browne. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from R. H. Browne to Dr. Joe Hendron, dated 17 December 1996:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions concerning the building cost location factor for Northern Ireland.

PQ2066

The building cost location factor for Northern Ireland is currently 0.75.

PQ2067

The building cost location factor for Northern Ireland is lower than the factors for England and Wales because the cost of construction, as measured by the Building Cost Information Service provided by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, is lower in Northern Ireland than in England or Wales.

PQ2068

The location factors for General Medical Practitioners in Northern Ireland and Great Britain were reviewed for 1996–97, applicable from 1st April 1996. These location factors were produced by the BCIS and were current at that time.

PQ2069

The principles of the GP Cost Rent Schemes and the source of the location factors are the same throughout the United Kingdom. By definition the location factors will vary according to local current building costs.

It is hoped that the above information fully explains the situation but should you require any further details I will be happy to provide them.

Information Technology Projects

Ms Church: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 11 November, *Official Report*, column *69*, what were the proposed annual savings for the nine IT projects in the bands above and including £1 million to £2 million, undertaken since 1992; and what have been the realised annual savings. [6711]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 28 November 1996]:* The information is not available in the form requested. However, the available information is listed:

Cost band (£ million)	*Number of IT projects*	*Proposed savings (£ million)*	*Realised savings (£ million)*
1–2	2	0.959	[1]0.441
	3	8	[2]—
	1	[3]—	6.8
2–3	1	1.3	[2]—
3–4	1	0.701	[2]—
5–6	1	This project has been curtailed	

[1] In addition to unquantifiable productivity gains.
[2] Implementation of project not yet complete, therefore realised savings not available.
[3] Information not readily available. To provide the information would incur disproportionate cost.

Appointments

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the party political affiliations of the appointments which he made to statutory bodies and boards *(a)* between 1 April 1986 and 31 March 1996 and *(b)* 1 April and 1 July 1996. [9157]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* Information on the party political affiliation of those appointed to statutory bodies and boards during the period in question is not available. This information will, however, be available in the future for those persons appointed to bodies which fall within the remit of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Public Appointments, in line with the terms of the commissioner's guidance published on 1 July 1996.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list each appointment which he made to statutory boards and bodies between 1 April 1986 and 31 March 1996, the length of time of each of the appointments and the remuneration paid in respect of each appointment; and how many of the appointments were of members of political parties. [9156]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* To identify each appointment made and the remuneration level involved over a 10–year period would incur disproportionate costs. Current remuneration levels are, however, set out in "Public Bodies 1995", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Information is not available on the number of appointees during the period from April 1986 to March 1996 who were members of political parties.

Prisoners

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what estimate he has made of the number of drug dependent prisoners currently detained in prisons in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [9201]

(2) for what reasons women convicted of terrorist offences are routinely strip-searched when leaving or returning to prison from periods of parole; and how many women prisoners were strip-searched in each of the last five years; [9171]

(3) what representations he has received in respect of discrimination against women convicted of terrorist offences. [9280]

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* Responsibility for the subjects in these questions has been delegated to the Prison Service under its chief executive, Mr. Alan Shannon. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Alan Shannon to Mr. Max Madden, dated 16 December 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to the 3 Parliamentary Questions you have tabled. You requested the information regarding:

- the number of drug dependent prisoners currently detained in prisons in Northern Ireland;
- the reasons why women convicted of terrorist offences are routinely strip-searched when leaving or returning to prison from periods of parole and how many women were strip-searched in each of the last 5 years; and
- what representations the Secretary of State has received in respect of discrimination against women convicted of terrorist offences.

There are currently no persons detained in prisons in Northern Ireland who are registered as being drug dependent.

Full searching (referred to as strip-searching in your question) is a necessary measure to maintain prison security. A full search is a visual search only and at no time is the prisoner entirely undressed. Prison staff do not have the power to conduct any body cavity search although they may require prisoners to open their mouths.

All prisoners (male and female) are routinely full searched when leaving or returning to the prison to inhibit the passage of items such as explosives, weapons, drugs and other contraband into and out of the prison in order to reduce the risk of escape and for the general safety of prisoners, staff and visitors.

The average female population and the number of female committals in each of the last 5 calendar years was:—

	Average female population	*Number of female committals*
1996 to 31st October 1996	30	169
1995	35	159
1994	41	198
1993	40	158
1992	41	166

As to the question of representations made to the Secretary of State, I regret we do not keep statistics in a form which would enable us to answer it.

I hope that this information is helpful.

HEALTH

"New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans"

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what costs quoted in the document, "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" were prepared in his Department; what detailed assumptions and interpretations were provided to officials in his Department to enable preparation of each cost; and what was the total cost to public funds of preparing each estimate. [6345]

Mr. Horam: The Department of Health, in conjunction with Her Majesty's Treasury, prepared factual material relating to costings published in "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" numbered 56 to 63. The detailed assumptions and interpretations that were provided to officials are set out in my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary's reply to the hon. Gentleman of today. It is not the normal working practice to keep a record of the time spent in providing factual information to Ministers and it is not therefore possible to offer a reliable estimate of the costs involved.

Family Health Services

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the future of family health services. [9495]

Mr. Dorrell: The Government today publish a White Paper, "Primary Care: Delivering the Future", which responds to many of the issues raised in the primary care debate launched by the Government last year. It sets out practical proposals to improve further the quality and accessibility of primary care services and to offer improved development and career opportunities for the professionals who work in them. "Primary Care: Delivering the Future" complements the proposals set out in the recent White Paper, "Primary Care: Choice and Opportunity". Copies of both White Papers are available in the Library.

Secure Accommodation (Young People)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many young people were being held in local authority secure accommodation *(a)* on criminal grounds and *(b)* on care grounds by age and by gender on the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement; [9123]

(2) how many young people in local authority secure accommodation on criminal grounds were *(a)* on remand, *(b)* sentenced under section 52(2) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1993 and *(c)* held on other grounds, on the last date for which figures are available. [9083]

Mr. Burns: I refer the hon. Member to table D in "Children Accommodated in Secure Units year ending 31 March 1996, England" A/F 96/21, copies of which are available in the Library. Information on which part of section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 under which a young person is detained is not collected centrally.

Renal Services (Greater Manchester)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response has been received from the South Manchester University Hospitals NHS trust to the consultation document on the future of renal services in Greater Manchester; when he expects a decision to be announced; and if he will make a statement. [9180]

Mr. Horam: The response from South Manchester University Hospitals NHS trust is one of many responses to consultation which West Penine health authority is evaluating. The right hon. Member may wish to approach Mr. P. Hadfield, chairman of the trust, or Mr. J. S. Downs chairman of West Pennine health authority, for further details. The lead purchaser will present its evaluation to the seven participating health authorities in mid-January 1997. Members of each authority will then be given the opportunity to consider the proposals further.

East London and City Health Authority

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral statement of 2 December concerning future funding of the East London and City health authority, *Official Report*, column *686*, what was the source of the additional funds he referred to; and when his decisions on the amounts and purposes will be *(a)* determined and *(b)* published. [9318]

Mr. Malone: From within the overall settlement for hospital and community health services, revenue funds have been set aside for a number of special purposes.

The procedure and timetable for most of the schemes involved were set out in a circular letter to health authorities—EL(96)109—copies of which are available in the Library.

Decisions on applications for special assistance to health authorities undergoing structural or strategic change will be determined and published individually.

Legislation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many items of legislation relating to his Department have been repealed since January 1994; how many statutory instruments were introduced during the same period; and how many of the latter were *(a)* deregulatory and *(b)* fee orders. [9362]

Mr. Horam: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster gave her today.

Prednisolone

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of (i) afflictions for which the steroid Prednisolone is prescribed, (ii) the side-effects which have been recorded and (iii) the alternative treatments there are for such conditions; and if he will make a statement. [9647]

Mr. Malone: Prednisolone is a corticosteroid licensed for more than 70 specific indications which are serious or life threatening, such as asthma, malignant diseases, and arthritic disorders.

The side effects of Prednisolone are well known and documented in product information for doctors and patients and in the British National Formulary, copies of which are available in the Library.

Other treatments are available for many of the diseases for which Prednisolone is indicated. These are not usually alternatives, but are used to treat symptoms rather than modify the disease process.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people *(a)* have been prescribed and *(b)* have taken the steroid Prednisolone in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9646]

Mr. Malone: It is not possible to identify the number of people who were prescribed Prednisolone.

Medical Negligence Claims

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total compensation paid by the NHS in medical negligence claims in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9651]

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the figures that were given to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn), on 6 March 1995, *Official Report*, columns *41–42*, and 17 May 1996, column, *586*, and to the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) on 28 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns *371–72*.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical negligence claims have been (i) brought and (ii) been successful against NHS physicians in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9650]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not held centrally.

Dental Registrations

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new registrations on the dental register have been made in each year since 1985; and if he will make a statement. [9443]

Mr. Malone: The number of new registrations added to the dental register since 1985 is in the table.

Number of new registrations on the dental register from 1985 to date

Registered for	*Total*
1985	1,103
1986	1,036
1987	1,083
1988	1,038
1989	1,047
1990	1,206
1991	1,075
1992	1,141
1993	1,254
1994[1]	571
1995	1,041

Source:
Dental register.
Note:
[1] The drop in the number added to the register in 1994 is due to the effect of the extension in 1990 of the British dental undergraduate course from four years and one term to five years.

Private Health Insurance

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people with private health insurance cover in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [9447]

Mr. Horam: The Department does not collect this information.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names of the members of the Medicines Control Agency together with their *(a)* other employers, *(b)* other voluntary and paid work undertaken, *(c)* length of service and *(d)* areas of expertise; if he will set out the reasons for their appointment in each case; and if he will make a statement. [9653]

Mr. Malone: The Medicines Control Agency, MCA, is an agency of the Department of Health whose staff are employees of the Department of Health on standard civil service terms and conditions.

Decisions regarding the licensing of medicines are made by the licensing authority—United Kingdom Health Ministers. For all new drugs, the licensing authority seeks the advice of the Committee on Safety of Medicines before deciding whether they should be licensed.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the *(a)* total and *(b)* percentage of funding provided for the Medicines Control Agency by the pharmaceutical companies in the current year; and if he will make a statement. [9652]

Mr. Malone: Apart from interest earned on bank balances and minor receipts for miscellaneous services, the Medicines Control Agency's income receipts for 1996–97 are currently estimated to total about £25 million, all of which will comprise fees from pharmaceutical companies.

Prescription Drugs Damages Cases

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescription drugs damages cases (i) have been brought and (ii) were successful against *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* pharmaceutical companies in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9649]

Mr. Malone: The information requested is not held centrally.

Complications Admissions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate *(a)* how many and *(b)* the percentage of people who have been admitted to hospital as a direct result of complications after (i) surgery and (ii) medicinal treatment in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9648]

Mr. Horam: Information on hospital admissions following surgical and medical care is set out in the table. As to the number of hospital admissions relating to an adverse reaction to a medicament, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 14 November, *Official Report*, columns *334–35*.

Complications of surgical and medical care and percentage of all operations and procedures (ICD codes 996–999): Finished consultant episodes

England

ICD code	*Description*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
996	Complications peculiar to certain specified procedures	24,152	30,667	36,108	39,976	44,168
997	Complications affecting specified body systems, not elsewhere classified	5,432	6,663	9,082	10,408	11,810
998	Other complications of procedures, not elsewhere classified	22,687	25,860	29,629	31,797	35,629
999	Complications of medical care, not elsewhere classified	641	669	826	887	968
Totals		52,912	68,889	75,645	83,068	92,575
Percentage		1.2	1.4	1.5	1.5	1.6

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Disorder

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has had from the charity Miracles in relation to recognition of multiple chemical sensitivity disorder in the United Kingdom and other issues; what response he is making; what action he plans to take; and if he will make a statement. [9425]

Mr. Horam: I shall let the right hon. Member have such information as is available as soon as possible.

SCOTLAND

"New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans"

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what costs quoted in the document, "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans", were prepared in his Department; what detailed assumptions and interpretations were provided to officials in his Department to enable preparation of each cost; and what was the total cost to public funds of preparing each estimate. [6346]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Office, in conjunction with the Treasury, prepared factual material relating to costings published in "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" numbered 81, 82, 83 and 89. The detailed assumptions and interpretations that were provided to officials are set out in the reply given today by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary. It is not the normal working practice to keep a record of the time spent in providing factual information to Ministers and it is not therefore possible to offer a reliable estimate of the costs involved.

Publicity

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what promotional and public information campaigns his Department is *(a)* currently running and *(b)* planning to run during the next six months; and for each campaign (i) how much it will cost, (1) in total and (2) to his Department, (ii) what agencies or bodies are undertaking the work and (iii) what is its planned duration. [7411]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Details of current and planned promotional and public information campaigns by my Department are set out in the table.

Campaigns currently running	*Campaigns planned over the next six months*	*Cost*		*Agencies undertaking work*	*Planned duration*
		(i) In total £	*(ii) To Department* £		
	Fire Prevention Burning Christmas Tree	—	37,000	Faulds Advertising	3 weeks
	Fire Action Plan	—	164,000	Faulds Advertising	4 weeks
Tackling Violence		[1]Still to be agreed		Faulds Advertising	16 weeks
	Severe Weather	[2]400,000	[3]200,000	Barkers Scotland	14 weeks
	Pre-School Vouchers—procedures and processes	[1]Still to be agreed		Barkers Scotland	Phase 1—6 weeksPhase 2—3 weeks
Christmas Drink Driving		—	52,000	Faulds Advertising	3 weeks
Food Hygiene		[1]Still to be agreed		Faulds Advertising	4 weeks
	Firearms Control	—	40,000	Faulds Advertising	Still to be finalised
	Promotion of Historic Properties and Public Information[3]	[1]Still to be agreed		Marr Associates	16 weeks
	Absent Voters	—	47,000	Faulds Advertising	1 week

Department have been repealed since January 1994; how many statutory instruments were introduced during the same period; and how many of the latter were *(a)* deregulatory and *(b)* fee orders. [9369]

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

Water Bills

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current amount for water bills allowed for in assessments of benefit entitlement; and by how much it has increased since 1994. [9181]

Mr. Burt: Social security benefits do not identify separate amounts for specific expenditure items. Benefit levels are considered for uprating each year and we seek to take account of all relevant factors including water costs as part of that exercise.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which weather stations are used for the purpose of cold weather payments in those areas covered by postcodes NE1 to NE49. [9606]

Mr. Roger Evans: The weather stations used for the postcodes NE1 to 49 inclusive are as follows:

Boltshope Park: NE19, 44, 47–48

Boulmer: NE22, 24

Carlisle: NE49

Newcastle: NE1–13, 15–18, 20–21, 23, 25–43, 45–46

Note:

Postcode NE14 does not exist.

PRIME MINISTER

Libya (Sanctions)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what action he is taking to enter into dialogue with Arab and African countries about sanctions against Libya; [8012]

(2) what recent representations he has received from *(a)* France, *(b)* Arab states and *(c)* the USA on the reconsideration of UN sanctions against Libya. [9393]

The Prime Minister: When the need arises, we remind other Governments, including Arab and African Governments, that sanctions against Libya must remain in place until Libya complies fully with the requirements of the United Nations Security Council's resolutions. These requirements include the surrender of those accused of the Lockerbie bombing for trial in Scotland or the United States.

The Arab League and some Arab Governments have pressed for sanctions to be lifted and a compromise reached on Lockerbie.

The US and French Governments agree with us that sanctions against Libya must remain in place until Libya complies fully with the requirements of the UN Security Council's resolutions.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 17 December. [8127]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Council of Europe and WEU

Sir Michael Shersby: To ask the Prime Minister if he will announce the composition of the United Kingdom delegation for the 1997 ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. [9742]

The Prime Minister: The 1997 ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will be opened in Strasbourg on 27 January 1997. The delegation from the United Kingdom for the Session will consist of 19 members of the Conservative party, 15 members of the Labour party and two members from the minority parties.

The appointments of representatives and substitutes have been made on the basis of nominations by the parties concerned in accordance with the resolution of the House on 22 May 1992, *Official Report*, column 682 and the House of Lords on 18 June 1992, *Official Report, House of Lords*, columns 290–92.

The same delegation will be representing the United Kingdom Parliament at the Assembly of the Western European Union.

Representatives from the Government benches will be:

My hon. Friend, the Member for Reading, West, (Sir A. Durant) who will continue to act as leader of both delegations.

My right hon. and hon. Friends the Members for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) for Warwick and Leamington (Sir D. Smith), for Calder Valley (Sir D. Thompson), for Ashford (Sir K. Speed), for Medway (Dame P. Fenner), for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) for Ravensbourne (Sir J. Hunt), for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), and Lord Newall.

Representatives from the Labour party will be:

The hon. Members for: Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), for Tooting (Mr. Cox), for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson), for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond), for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis), and Lord Kirkhill.

The representative from the minority parties will be the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston).

The following substitutes have been appointed to act as necessary on behalf of the delegates from the Government benches:
The hon. Members for Sheffield, Hallam (Sir I. Patnick), for Norfolk, North (Sir R. Howell), for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir W. Bowden), for Salisbury (Mr. Key), for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks), for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman), for Newark (Mr. Alaxander), Baroness Hooper and Earl of Dundee.

From the Labour Party the hon. Members for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington), for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray), for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes), for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe), for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe), for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall), for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland) and Baroness Gould of Potternewton.

From the minority parties: Lord Mackie of Benshie.

Sir Anthony Durant: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a copy of the latest information bulletin of the United Kingdom delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Assembly of the Western European Union. [9785]

The Prime Minister: I have done so today.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Prime Minister how many of the individuals appointed by his Department to public positions in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit. [8548]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* Eight of the individuals appointed by me in the last year were first identified by the public appointments unit.

State Opening of Parliament

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has to reduce the expenditure on the state opening of

Proposals/appeals in relation to the list in force on 1 April 1993.

Region area	Number of proposals/appeals[1]	Disposal of proposals/appeals: Valuation appeal committee activities: Settled before citation[2]	Cited to be heard by VAC	Settled before VAC hearing	Heard and resolved by VAC	Cited and not yet determined
Scottish Borders	3,003	2,468	535	516	19	0
Strathclyde	39,906	30,539	9,367	6,937	2,410	20
Tayside	11,339	10,305	957	769	176	12

Source:
Quarterly CTAPP(ASS)(96) return for September 1996 from Assessors.
Notes:
[1] Number of proposals/appeals lodged with Assessors Departments.
[2] Number of proposals/appeals settled between the appellant and Assessor which are therefore not cited to be heard by the VAC.

Proposals/appeals in relation to the list after 1 April 1993.

Valuation board area	Number of proposals/ appeals[1]	Disposal of proposals/appeals: Valuation appeal committee activities: Settled before citation[2]	Cited to be heard by VAC	Settled before VAC hearing	Heard and resolved by VAC	Cited and not yet determined
Scotland	12,539	7,489	3,628	2,281	971	376
Ayrshire	1,258	948	157	81	75	1
Central	89	85	1	0	0	1
Dumfries and Galloway	320	192	111	63	42	6
Dunbartonshire and Argyll and Bute	1,115	680	320	168	137	15
Fife	379	180	60	50	10	0
Glasgow	2,752	1,572	1,047	529	257	261
Grampian	1,028	753	202	127	55	20
Highland and Western Isles	825	522	212	124	77	11
Lanark	1,463	764	447	249	148	50
Lothian	1,335	640	634	531	95	8
Orkney and Shetland	37	34	3	0	3	0
Renfrew	779	278	350	294	56	0
Scottish Borders	203	156	37	34	3	0
Tayside	956	685	47	31	13	3

Source:
Quarterly CTAPP(ASS)(96) return for September 1996 from Assessors.
Notes:
[1] Number of proposals/appeals lodged with Assessors Departments.
[2] Number of proposals/appeals settled between the appellant and Assessor which are therefore not cited to be heard by the VAC.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of non-domestic properties in each local authority area and their rateable value at 31 March. [9395]

Mr. Kynoch: The table shows the number and rateable value of non-domestic properties in each local authority area at 1 April 1996.

Local Authority	Number of non-domestic subjects: Total properties	Total rateable value (£)
Scotland	212,288	3,775,326,225
Aberdeen City	8,924	260,810,628
Aberdeenshire	11,409	116,920,027
Angus	4,916	51,597,353
Argyll and Bute	7,025	66,017,596
Clackmannanshire	1,377	28,011,501
Dumfries and Galloway	9,269	76,797,679
Dundee City	6,137	122,563,445
East Ayrshire	4,026	54,957,128
East Dunbartonshire	2,133	41,541,463
East Lothian	2,960	62,315,999
East Renfrewshire	1,725	26,948,160
City of Edinburgh	18,085	511,466,503
Falkirk	4,963	116,252,593
Fife	12,786	254,135,448
City of Glasgow	27,053	636,652,756
Highland	15,602	136,590,366
Inverclyde	2,508	49,017,947
Midlothian	2,099	34,269,370
Moray	5,445	48,373,574
North Ayrshire	4,857	91,244,369
North Lanarkshire	8,798	177,737,011
Orkney Islands	1,643	15,665,054
Perth and Kinross	7,470	92,763,007
Shetland Islands	1,801	39,767,502
Renfrewshire	5,311	134,353,469
South Ayrshire	4,440	72,149,159
South Lanarkshire	9,382	173,053,815
Stirling	4,373	66,082,555
Scottish Borders	6,839	49,955,742
West Dunbartonshire	2,590	57,584,941
West Lothian	4,232	97,506,205
Western Isles	2,110	12,223,860

Source:
Annual RVASS return from assessors.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many appeals were lodged in each local authority area following the 1995 general revaluation. [9396]

Mr. Kynoch: The information requested is given in the table.

Number of appeals following the 1995 revaluation for non-domestic rates

Valuation board	Council	Number of appeals[1]	Number of properties[2]
Ayrshire	East Ayrshire	2,213	2,037
	North Ayrshire	2,380	2,289
	South Ayrshire	2,629	2,425
Central Scotland	Clackmannanshire	637	625
	Falkirk	2,735	2,586

Number of appeals following the 1995 revaluation for non-domestic rates

Valuation board	Council	Number of appeals[1]	Number of properties[2]
	Stirling	2,162	2,021
Dumfries and Galloway	Dumfries and Galloway	3,025	2,923
Dunbartonshire and Argyll and Bute	Argyll and Bute	3,057	2,885
	East Dunbartonshire	1,187	1,107
	West Dunbartonshire	1,415	1,329
Fife	Fife	6,244	5,859
Glasgow	Glasgow city	18,677	16,084
Grampian	Aberdeen city	5,498	4,924
	Aberdeenshire	3,302	3,135
	Moray	1,486	1,436
Highland and Western Isles	Highland	5,882	5,500
	Western Isles	318	311
Lanarkshire	North Lanarkshire	5,045	4,501
	South Lanarkshire	5,290	4,629
Lothian	East Lothian	1,005	967
	Edinburgh	9,150	8,517
	Midlothian	777	743
	West Lothian	2,392	2,139
Orkney and Shetland	Orkney	174	167
	Shetland	294	286
Renfrewshire	East Renfrewshire	1,071	985
	Inverclyde	1,713	1,479
	Renfrewshire	3,721	3,285
Scottish Borders	Scottish Borders	1,944	1,892
Tayside	Angus	1,714	1,665
	Dundee city	3,791	3,394
	Perth and Kinross	2,477	2,349
All Scotland		103,405	94,474

[1] Appeals and complaints lodged with assessors departments in relation to the 1995 revaluation.

[2] The number of properties against which there are appeals. This is less than the number of appeals because there are, in some cases more than one appeal in relation to a property. For example, both the owner and the tenant of a property may appeal.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of households in each local authority area, by council tax bands, at 31 March. [9397]

Mr. Kynoch: Information is not available on the number of households by council tax band. The table shows the latest available information—for October 1996—on the number of dwellings on the valuation list in each local authority area by council tax band.

Number of dwellings by council tax band at 7 October 1996

Authority	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H	Total
Scotland	606,313	572,369	342,732	251,768	248,421	119,502	80,757	9,658	2,231,520
Aberdeen City	21,788	27,260	16,657	9,375	11,612	6,888	6,183	652	100,415
Aberdeenshire	20,871	15,272	12,464	13,690	15,182	8,626	5,183	375	91,663
Angus	15,449	12,025	6,211	6,733	5,394	1,643	819	136	48,410
Argyll and Bute	7,881	9,261	9,093	5,142	6,291	3,196	2,120	207	43,191
Clackmannanshire	6,502	6,734	1,668	1,954	2,301	801	525	35	20,520
Dumfries and Galloway	11,476	22,249	9,971	8,443	8,359	3,365	1,603	144	65,610
Dundee City	35,504	16,364	6,188	6,699	4,734	1,398	674	32	71,593
East Ayrshire	27,361	9,557	3,551	4,725	4,038	1,489	349	30	51,100
East Dunbartonshire	1,318	3,879	7,880	6,870	10,468	5,785	5,190	422	41,812
East Lothian	1,184	8,871	13,198	4,435	4,336	2,824	2,352	403	37,603
East Renfrewshire	1,511	5,073	3,549	5,713	7,435	5,452	4,907	542	34,182
Edinburgh city	26,868	44,262	38,122	27,679	30,439	18,867	16,605	2,946	205,788
Falkirk	22,739	18,523	5,012	6,129	5,790	2,109	876	37	61,215
Fife	42,966	47,364	18,660	15,276	16,281	6,936	3,772	340	151,595
Glasgow city	94,457	73,839	55,677	31,179	19,189	6,879	4,240	562	286,022
Highland	19,749	21,680	18,367	14,023	12,954	5,074	2,423	273	94,543
Inverclyde	24,243	4,332	2,405	2,382	2,645	1,387	997	156	38,547
Midlothian	1,137	11,641	9,482	3,530	3,455	1,437	979	140	31,801
Moray	12,005	9,863	5,288	4,741	3,648	1,113	418	103	37,179
North Ayrshire	21,722	17,913	5,672	5,307	6,498	2,068	790	42	60,012
North Lanarkshire	56,680	35,745	14,573	9,856	9,126	3,204	1,033	32	130,249
Orkney	2,928	2,506	1,720	1,229	692	136	13	2	9,226
Perth and Kinross	9,290	14,212	9,879	7,983	9,241	4,758	3,241	488	59,092
Renfrewshire	17,590	25,452	11,300	8,104	8,268	4,158	2,425	194	77,491
Scottish Borders	16,164	12,434	5,765	4,613	4,669	2,889	2,211	318	49,063
Shetland	3,368	1,726	2,306	1,275	781	135	28	2	9,621
South Ayrshire	7,393	12,255	7,709	6,976	8,044	3,917	2,312	210	48,816
South Lanarkshire	37,779	29,306	21,362	14,886	12,087	5,533	3,211	241	124,405
Stirling	6,826	8,101	3,469	3,072	5,035	3,911	3,600	479	34,493
West Dunbartonshire	8,919	17,689	6,848	3,706	3,826	1,011	361	25	42,385
West Lothian	17,565	23,387	6,178	4,834	4,978	2,404	1,289	83	60,718
Western Isles	5,080	3,594	2,508	1,209	625	109	28	7	13,160

All dwellings, including exempt dwellings but excluding free-standing lock-ups.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the amount of grant-aided expenditure to each local authority for 1996–97 to support the provision of council tax valuation for rating and electoral registration services. [9400]

Mr. Kynoch: The valuation for council tax and electoral registration grant-aided expenditure assessments are each distributed in proportion to the number of dwellings valued for council tax. The relevant figures for each local authority for 1996–97 are shown in the table.

£000

	Valuation for council tax GAE	Electrol registration GAE
Aberdeen City	394	148
Aberdeenshire	359	135
Angus	190	71
Argyll and Bute	171	64
Scottish Borders	193	73
Clackmannanshire	81	30
West Dunbartonshire	167	63
Dumfries and Galloway	258	97
Dundee City	284	107
East Ayrshire	203	76
East Dunbartonshire	166	62
East Lothian	148	56
East Renfrewshire	135	51
Edinburgh	811	305
Falkirk	241	91
Fife	594	224
Glasgow	1,139	429
Highland	371	140
Inverclyde	155	58
Midlothian	125	47
Moray	146	55
North Ayrshire	236	89
North Lanarkshire	512	193
Orkney	36	13
Perthshire and Kinross	232	87
Renfrewshire	303	114
Shetland Islands	38	14
South Ayrshire	192	72
South Lanarkshire	490	184
Stirling	135	51
West Lothian	236	89
Western Isles	52	20

Prescribed Drugs (Adverse Effects)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people have *(a)* become crippled and *(b)* died from taking the steroid Prednisolone in Scotland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9639]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information is not held centrally on the number of people crippled from taking the steroid Prednisolone in Scotland.

There have been no deaths in Scotland in the last five years where the steroid Prednisolone has been mentioned on the death certificate.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much in total his Department has failed to recover from companies defaulting on the terms of awards of regional selective assistance for each of the last 10 financial years; and if he will list the companies from which his Department has failed to recoup these moneys. [6481]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 28 November 1996]:* The amounts of regional selective assistance grant written off each year since 1990–91, the earliest year for which records are available, are given in the table.

	£ million	Number of individual cases
1990–91	0.45	21
1991–92	1.39	16
1992–93	0.87	21
1993–94	0.20	6
1994–95	19.90	28
1995–96	1.25	13

Payments of regional selective assistance to individual companies are generally regarded as commercially confidential as are any grant payments subsequently recovered or written off. It is, however, already public knowledge that in 1994–95 an amount of £17.6 million was written off in respect of the Health Care International case, and this amount is included in the total shown for that year.

Companies (Financial Assistance)

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what types of financial assistance his Department provides to companies creating or safeguarding employment with proposed development within Scotland; and under what legislation these payments have been made. [6489]

Mr. Kynoch *[holding answer 28 November 1996]:* Grant assistance from the Scottish Office for these purposes is generally given under the powers of the Industrial Development Act 1982. The principal grant assistance scheme is regional selective assistance, for which the legislative authority is section 7 of that Act. Full details of assistance given under the Act are contained in the publication "Industrial Development Act 1982: Annual Report by the Secretaries for Trade and Industry, Scotland and Wales for the year ended 31 March 1996" London, HMSO, 1996.

Agri-environmental Schemes

Sir Jerry Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each of the agri-environmental schemes for which his Department is responsible, (i) actual expenditure in 1992–93, 1993–94, 1994–95 and 1995–96, (ii) provision and estimated outturn of expenditure in 1996–97 and (iii) planned expenditure in 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000, distinguishing in each case between *(a)* payments to farmers, *(b)* running costs and *(c)* monitoring costs. [8008]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* The information is set out in the following table. Information on running costs is not collected separately and it is not possible at this stage to make forward projection of monitoring costs for other than environmentally sensitive areas. Overall planned provision is £9.235 million for 1997–98, £13.468 million for 1998–99 and £15.7 million for 1999–2000.

£000

	Actual					
	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97 Provision	1996–97 Estimate
Payments to farmers and crofters						
Environmentally sensitive areas	1,086	963	1,044	2,525	5,000	3,898
Habitats[1]	—	—	—	—	600	152
Heather moorland[1]	—	—	—	—	2,928	99
Countryside premium scheme	—	—	—	—	—	—
Organic aid	—	—	—	53	170	100
Set-aside access[1]	—	—	—	[2]4	240	2
Monitoring costs						
Environmentally sensitive areas	91	—	238	307	310	310

[1] These schemes will be closed to new applications from 1 January 1997 and will be superseded by the countryside premium scheme which is scheduled for introduction early in 1997.
[2] Includes cost of signs.

Seat Belts

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate how many *(a)* drivers, *(b)* front seat passengers and *(c)* back seat passengers have been (i) killed and (ii) injured as a result of not wearing a seat belt in a vehicle in Scotland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [8227]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 11 December 1996]:* The table provides the recorded statistics on the number of drivers and passengers killed or injured in Scotland in cars or vans while not wearing a seat belt, whether or not one was fitted. Separate information between front and back seat casualties is only available for cars. Statistics for seat belt wearing are only available until 1993 and only for the occupants of cars and vans. The table does not include figures for casualties where the wearing of a belt was not reported–about 11 per cent. of all casualties.

	1991		1992		1993	
	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured
Car or van drivers	23	332	27	305	26	285
Car or van passengers	52	1501	28	1,087	24	913
Front seat car passengers	15	149	13	142	8	129
Rear seat car passengers	29	1,242	13	874	16	733
All van passengers	8	110	2	71	—	51

Separate information on the number of casualties in Scotland saved by wearing seat belts is not available, but for Great Britain as a whole it is estimated that 510 lives and 8,800 serious injuries have been saved each year as a result of seat belts being worn.

Student Grants

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the cost of making student grants available at 1990 levels in 1996–97 prices in Scotland. [9080]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 12 December 1996]:* Expenditure on student awards in Scotland in financial year 1990–91 was £172.46 million. The equivalent cost at 1996–97 prices, adjusted for the increased number of award holders, is estimated to be £333,657 million.

Nursery Vouchers

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the administrative cost in each local authority area in Scotland of implementing the nursery voucher scheme in the first full year of its operation. [8969]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* The operational evaluation of the pilot year voucher schemes which I have commissioned from a research team at Stirling university will look, amongst other things, at the impact on providers, including the four piloting authorities, of introducing the voucher system. This research will be published following submission of the research team's final report in early autumn 1997.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

BSE

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about bovine spongiform encephalopathy. [10143]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A further report on bovine spongiform encephalopathy was placed in the Library of the House today.

The report gives an update on new virus Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease cases and explains the new measures taken on cattle identification and animal feed. Reference is made to the five point plan agreed in Florence for the resumption of exports and explains that all the preconditions, with the exception of the accelerated slaughter programme, have been complied with. It also details the sustained improvement in the handling of specified bovine material in slaughterhouses. The report also announces the occurrence of transmissible spongiform encephalopathy in a domestic cat born after the extension of the specified bovine ban in September 1990.

The number of clinically suspect cases of BSE reported in Great Britain has continued to fall, and at 31 October 1996 was 36.1 per cent. less than at the same time in 1995, and 63.3 per cent. less than the same time in 1994. A continued improvement is expected for the future.

Renderers and Abattoirs (Prosecutions)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list each prosecution initiated by his Department which has now been completed against *(a)* renderers, *(b)* abattoirs, *(c)* livestock dealers, *(d)* animal feed manufacturers and *(e)* pet food manufacturers in each year since 1990, with in each case the (i) name of the individual or organisation prosecuted, (ii) nature of the charges and (iii) outcome of the prosecution; and if he will make a statement. [3505]

Mr. Boswell: Available records do not reveal any prosecutions as having been instituted by the Department against *(a)* renderers, *(d)* animal feed manufacturers, or *(e)* pet food manufacturers during the years in question.

The following prosecutions, initiated by the Department, have been completed in the relevant years.

1990

One prosecution of an abattoir under the pig carcase grading regulations. Convictions on three charges sustained on appeal. Conviction now spent.

1991

One prosecution of a livestock dealer for offences in relation to certification for export of squirrel monkeys. Conviction now spent.

1992

No relevant prosecutions.

1993

One prosecution of a livestock dealer by name of White for offences relating to movement of animal records. Fined a total of £2,500, ordered to pay £1,000 costs.

1994

One prosecution of an abattoir by name of Casemore for offences in relation to maximum residue limits in meat, and record keeping. Fined a total of £800, ordered to pay £400 costs.

One prosecution of a mink keeper by name of Smith for keeping mink on unlicensed premises. Fined £5,000, ordered to pay £700 costs.

1995

One prosecution of a company called Towers Barron Ltd. for acting as a cutting premises without a licence. Fined a total of £2,750, ordered to pay £1,423 costs.

One prosecution of an individual called White for three similar offences. Fined a total of £1,000, ordered to pay £1,340 costs.

One prosecution of a livestock dealer called Shone for offences relating to export certification for horses. Fined £1,500, ordered to pay £4,000 costs.

1996 (to date)

One prosecution of an abattoir called Bakers for failure to stain, and failure to separate specified bovine offal. Fined a total of £3,000, ordered to pay £2,000 costs.

One prosecution of an abattoir run by an individual called Kellow for similar offences. Fined £1,500, ordered to pay £1,050 costs.

One prosecution of an abattoir called Stillmans (Somerset) Ltd. for similar offences. Fined a total of £7,500, ordered to pay £3,000 costs.

One prosecution of an abattoir run by Blackpool Abattoir Co. Ltd. for failure to separate specified bovine material. Fined £3,000, ordered to pay £1,818 costs.

One prosecution of an individual called Townsend who worked in an abattoir premises for using vertebral bones in the production of mechanically recovered meat. Fined £600, ordered to pay £1,380 costs.

One prosecution for unlicensed slaughtering against an individual called Newall. Fined £2,000, ordered to pay £1,500 costs.

One prosecution of a slaughterman in an abattoir under welfare rules. Fined £250.

One prosecution of a livestock dealer called Smith for record keeping offences. Fined a total of £3,800, ordered to pay £5,767 costs.

One prosecution of an individual called Hart for unlicensed cutting. Fined a total of £900, ordered to pay £500 costs.

To research these matters to provide more details of the prosecutions would entail excessive cost.

Mammalian Meat and Bone Meal (Transport)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what provisions other than the Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995 provide for the decontamination of vehicles used to transport mammalian meat and bone meal from potentially BSE-infected cattle; and if he will make a statement. [7947]

Mrs. Browning: Regulation 14 of the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Order 1996 requires any vehicle used to transport mammalian meat and bone meal, or material containing mammalian meat and bone meal, to be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected as soon as possible after the transport ceases and in any event before the vehicle is used for any other purpose.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Sir Robert Hicks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of applications *(a)* made during 1996 for the countryside stewardship scheme, (i) in total and (ii) for Devon and Cornwall; and if he will indicate the number (1) approved and (2) being processed; and *(b)* made in 1995 which have not yet been determined. [8693]

Mr. Boswell: Some 2,545 countryside stewardship applications were received during the 1996 application period; 1,336 have been identified for approval, of which 124 were in Devon and Cornwall. A total of 163 agreement offers have been issued, six in Devon and Cornwall, and the target is to issue all the remainder by the end of January.

Of the applications received, 873 have been rejected, 42 of which are in Devon and Cornwall. The remainder are still being processed.

Four 1995 applications in Devon and Cornwall passed to the Ministry by the Countryside Commission have not yet been determined. The equivalent figure for the scheme as a whole is not readily available.

Sir Robert Hicks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the average length of time his Department takes to process and approve applications for the countryside stewardship scheme; and if he will make a statement. [8694]

Mr. Boswell: The average length of time to process agreements in 1996 is likely to be about six months. This is no longer than had been expected, owing in part to

receipt of more applications than expected. It is the Ministry's intention to reduce the processing time for 1997.

Organic Produce

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the scope for increasing the size of the United Kingdom market for organic produce. [9221]

Mr. Boswell: The size of the market for organic produce will be determined by consumer demand and industry efforts to promote the market. However, it is already evident that demand is strong and that much is being met by imports. The Government are doing a great deal to encourage farmers and growers to respond. As well as providing aid for conversion to organic production, we also provide free advisory services and fund the United Kingdom register of organic food standards and a substantial organic research and development programme.

Legislation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many items of legislation relating to his Department have been repealed since January 1994; how many statutory instruments were introduced during that same period; and how many of the latter were *(a)* deregulatory and *(b)* fee orders. [9345]

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

Fishing Permits

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made concerning the scheme of fishing permits proposed for adoption after 2002. [9662]

Mr. Baldry: Council regulations 3760/92 and 1627/94 already provide the framework for Community licence and permit systems to enable member states to regulate fishing activities. These are the basis of the detailed measures in western waters introduced on 1 January 1996. The UK industry is therefore already familiar with these arrangements, which involves licences issued by UK fisheries Departments. The Government would reject any proposals to take away such national responsibilities and introduce a single EU fishing fleet managed and policed from Brussels.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Service (Female Appointments)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many female chief constables there have been since 1966. [8859]

Mr. Maclean: The first female chief constable was appointed on 31 July 1995 to Lancashire Constabulary. A second female chief constable was recently appointed to Wiltshire Constabulary with effect from 1 April 1997.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure that female police officers reach senior positions; and if he will make a statement. [8861]

Mr. Maclean: The police service, supported by the Government, actively pursues equal opportunities policies. Such policies directly affect the numbers of female police officers who are now able to reach the more senior ranks.

Every force has an equal opportunities statement which includes sections on unfair discrimination, and which is supported by a grievance procedure.

In addition, forces are committed to open selection and promotion systems and make regular use of the Equal Opportunities Commission codes of practice on selection and promotion.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary has been a driving force behind many equal opportunities initiatives and maintains an oversight of equal opportunity issues within the police service. The inspectorate carries out regular inspections of forces and monitors the implementation of equal opportunities policies.

Police forces are also subject, in common with other employers, to the requirements of the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. These require forces not to discriminate on the basis of race, colour, ethnic or national origin or gender in the recruitment and promotion of staff.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many female *(a)* chief constables, *(b)* deputy chief constables, *(c)* assistant chief constables, *(d)* chief superintendents and *(e)* superintendents there are currently. [8860]

Mr. Maclean: At present there is one chief constable, although there will be two with effect from 1 April 1997. There are seven assistant chief constables and 41 superintendents, the ranks of deputy chief constables and chief superintendent having been abolished in 1995.

Children and Crime Report

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recommendations of the recent Institute of Public Policy and Research report, "Children and Crime: Taking Responsibility". [8944]

Mr. Maclean: I cannot comment as I have not seen the report. If the hon. Member would like to send me a copy, I shall be happy to consider it.

Physical and Sexual Abuse

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into (i) the effects of physical and sexual abuse and (ii) the correlation between such abuse and offending. [9301]

Mr. Maclean: The Home Department has not carried out any research which specifically examines these questions.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of

convicted offenders who have suffered physical or sexual abuse in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9300]

Mr. Maclean: None. The information which would be required to make such estimates is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Police Helmets

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the traditional police helmet will be replaced by a new design. [9217]

Mr. Maclean: This is an operational matter for chief officers of police.

I understand that the Association of Chief Police Officers established a uniform project group in 1995 to research the national requirements for uniform and uniform-related equipment. Among the issues that the group is considering is the design of the traditional helmet, having regard for the need to afford police officers adequate protection.

It is important to preserve the reassuring image and tradition which the existing helmet helps bring to officers on foot patrol. We are, therefore, working with ACPO to ensure that any redesign of the helmet fully takes into account this unique symbol of the British "bobby" and will seek to preserve the traditional style so far as it is compatible with affording officers the protection they deserve.

Young Offenders

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juveniles were *(a)* cautioned and *(b)* found guilty of indictable offences, in each of the last 17 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [9091]

Mr. Maclean: Information available centrally on the number of young offenders cautioned and found guilty for indictable offences is published annually in "Criminal Statistics England and Wales". Table 5.26 of the 1995 edition, table 5.23 of the 1989 edition and table 5.19 of the 1983 edition refer.

Copies of the publications are available in the Library.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of recorded offenders were juveniles in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [9092]

Mr. Maclean: The information is given in the table.

Persons aged 10 to 17 found guilty or cautioned for indictable offences as a proportion of all offenders by sex 1991–95

England and Wales

Percentages

Sex	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Males	26	25	24	24	25
Females	32	33	31	34	34
Persons	27	27	25	26	26

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the joint statement on the sentencing of persistent young offenders recently issued by the Magistrates Association and Justices' Clerks Society. [9860]

Mr. Maclean: I very much welcome this excellent statement which encourages speedier sentencing of persistent young offenders.

The statement suggests that, when dealing with those who have committed multiple or "spree" offences, it would be right for the court to sentence for the offences currently before it rather than wait for further alleged offences to come to trial. Such steps should help to reduce the number of adjournments that may be needed, speed up youth justice and ensure that these offenders are promptly and properly punished.

I commend the Magistrates Association and Justices' Clerks Society for drawing up this guidance, which has been widely distributed within the criminal justice system.

Offenders (Ages)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the peak age of offending for men and women in *(a)* London and *(b)* England and Wales in (i) 1979, (ii) 1990 and (iii) the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [9096]

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 10 December 1996, *Official Report*, columns *134–35*.

Legislation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many items of legislation relating to his Department have been repealed since January 1994; how many statutory instruments were introduced during the same period; and how many of the latter were *(a)* deregulatory and *(b)* fee orders. [9363]

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster today.

Police Officers (Private Hire)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how much income from the hiring of police officers by private companies was raised by each regional police authority in England and Wales in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement; [9503]

(2) what guidelines he has issued to police authorities on the hiring of police officers by private companies; and if he will make a statement. [9502]

Mr. Maclean: Police Officers are not available for hire. Statistics on police income are published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, but these do not distinguish income derived from private companies.

Mentally Ill People (Prosecutions)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many mentally ill people receiving care

in the community have been *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* found guilty of (i) non-violent and (ii) violent crimes in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9610]

Mr. Maclean: The information is not collected.

Bus Attacks (Gwent)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many attacks on *(a)* passengers and *(b)* staff have been (i) reported, (ii) resulted in prosecutions and (iii) resulted in convictions in each of the last five years broken down by (1) gender and (2) age bands of 10 years in each of the bus companies operating in the Gwent region; and if he will make a statement. [9609]

Mr. Maclean: The information is not collected.

Vehicle Crime

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the statute of limitations for juvenile offenders involved in car crime. [9426]

Mr. Maclean: The Government are committed to tackling juvenile crime and have made a number of legislative changes specifically aimed at strengthening the courts' powers for dealing with young offenders. However, we are not aware that the limitation causes problems in practice and there are no plans at present to undertake any such review.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the maximum sentence that can be passed on a 17-year-old convicted of reckless driving. [9428]

Mr. Maclean: The maximum sentence that can be passed on a 17-year-old convicted on indictment of dangerous driving is two years detention and/or a fine of up to £1,000. Disqualification from driving is obligatory on conviction for this offence.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the maximum time after which the prosecution can be brought for a vehicle crime. [9427]

Mr. Maclean: Under section 127 of the Magistrates' Courts Act 1980, proceedings for summary offences, which include offences such as taking a vehicle without consent, must be commenced within six months of the date when the alleged offence occurred.

In the case of theft or aggravated vehicle-taking, where a vehicle is taken unlawfully without consent and there is dangerous driving, damage or injury to others before the vehicle is recovered, the offence can be tried either in a magistrates court or in the Crown court and no time limit applies.

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Justice and Home Affairs Council held in Brussels on 28 and 29 November. [9859]

Mr. Howard: I represented the United Kingdom at the Council. The main matters dealt with were as follows:

The Council agreed as "A" points, among other things, a joint action creating a directory of competences in the fight against organised crime, and a joint action establishing a European Community funded incentive and exchange programme to combat trafficking in human beings and child sex abuse.

The presidency reported progress in negotiations on the draft external frontiers convention, and on the Europol draft regulations. The United Kingdom hopes to ratify the Europol convention before the end of the year.

Meetings were held with Ministers of associated central and eastern European countries and, separately, with Cyprus. These concentrated on the fight against drugs and the need to co-operate against trafficking in human beings and paedophile rings.

Two reports were considered on the fight against organised crime, one dealing with the situation in 1995, the other looking forward to future possibilities for closer co-operation and assistance. The first report will be presented to the European Parliament in due course.

A joint action was agreed concerning action to combat trafficking in human beings and sexual abuse of children.

A draft report to the European Council on drugs in the European Union was discussed. Some amendments were agreed and the report will now be forwarded, via the General Affairs Council, to the European Council.

There was extensive discussion of a draft joint action, proposed by France, on approximation of laws and practices to combat drug consumption and drug trafficking. While a strong will was shown on all sides to combat drug trafficking, final agreement of the text of the action was deferred pending further consultations by several countries.

Agreement was reached on a draft resolution on sentencing for serious illicit drug trafficking. The text will now be submitted to the European Council.

The presidency outlined proposals for settling the outstanding issue of European Court of Justice jurisdiction in the draft convention on corruption. More work was commissioned on these proposals.

A report to the European Council on achievements in the field of justice and home affairs was briefly discussed. The text will now be finalised and forwarded to the European Council.

A brief summary was given of activities in the field of crime prevention, including the outcome of recent seminars and proposals for a follow-up seminar next year.

Priorities were outlined by the Netherlands for its presidency in the first half of 1997. These included implementation of the Europol convention, further work on action to combat drugs and organised crime, trafficking in human beings and abuse of the Internet, and development of the structured dialogue with the countries which are candidates for accession.

Discussions took place on aspects of the draft convention on the service of documents in civil and judicial matters. In the absence of agreement, further work was commissioned.

Conventions were signed allowing Sweden, Austria and Finland to accede to two conventions on jurisdiction and enforcement of judgments in civil and commercial matters and on the law applicable to contractual obligations. Protocols were signed providing on an optional basis for European Court of Justice jurisdiction in the European Union conventions on the protection of the European Communities financial interests and on the use of information technology for customs purposes.

Closed Circuit Television Challenge

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many bids have been received in the latest CCTV challenge competition; and if he will make a statement. [9861]

Mr. Maclean: The deadline for bids under round 3 of the closed circuit television challenge competition was 20 November. A total of £15 million is available to crime prevention partnerships in 1997–98 to support CCTV schemes and 371 bids have been received; the value of the bids is £26.8 million. The bids are now subject to detailed assessment. We shall be announcing the results of the competition early next year.

"New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans"

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what costs quoted in the document "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" were prepared in his Department; what detailed assumptions and interpretations were provided to officials in his Department to enable preparation of each cost; and what was the total cost to public funds of preparing each estimate. [6354]

Mr. Howard: The Home Office, in conjunction with Treasury, prepared factual material relating to costings published in "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" numbered 25, 26 and 89. The detailed assumptions and interpretations that were provided to officials are set out in my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary's reply to the hon. Member today. It is not normal working practice to keep a record of the time spent in providing factual information to Ministers and it is not therefore possible to offer a reliable estimate of the costs involved.

Stolen Guns and Vehicles (Deaths and Injuries)

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured by (i) stolen pistols and (ii) stolen motor vehicles in each of the last five years. [8945]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 13 December 1996]:* Information as to whether firearms used in offences have been stolen has not, in the past, been routinely collected centrally in England and Wales. However, a special exercise has recently been conducted to find out whether the guns used in homicide were licensed or not and, if not, whether they were stolen.

This covered the years 1992 to 1994, and out of a total of 55 homicides involving the use of a handgun where it was known that the weapon was illegally held, one was reported to have been stolen.

No information is held centrally to show whether motor vehicles involved in killing or injuring people were stolen.

Child Abuse

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the operation of the law in relation to the prosecution of child abuse cases. [7629]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* The Government commissioned several independent research projects to look into the effectiveness of measures introduced by the Criminal Justice Acts of 1988 and 1991 to improve the handling of cases involving child witnesses. These examined the use of live television links for giving evidence and the use of video-recorded interviews for giving evidence-in-chief, and the speed of prosecutions for cases involving child witnesses. Further research has been commissioned to evaluate the effectiveness of training given to those involved in child abuse investigations and into the admissibility and sufficiency of evidence gathered during those investigations, the results of which will be available at the end of 1997.

The findings from the completed research have shown that the legislation, and other supporting measures introduced by the Government have improved the management of child abuse cases. The Government will continue to make further changes where we consider, in the light of research and other information, they will bring further improvements.

Police (Contracted-out Services)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what studies he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the effects of contracting out services supplied by civilian personnel of police forces, with particular reference to (i) the morale of those currently employed, (ii) the security of information, (iii) unpredictable surges of work due to emergencies, (iv) discipline, (v) collective levels of skills and experience and (vi) the quality of communication with the forces concerned. [8810]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* These are operational matters for chief officers. As police authority for the Metropolitan police, I am aware that there has been a recent review of support services for the force and the Commissioner has advised me of the recommendations made and the decisions reached.

Police (Civil Staff)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement concerning recent changes to the employment conditions, terms and contracts of Metropolitan police civil staff support services; what consultation took place on those changes; how many staff are affected; what is the cost of implementing the changes with particular reference to *(a)* consultancy fees, *(b)* redundancies and *(c)* early retirement plans; when the changes will be fully implemented. [8882]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that there has been no recent change to the

employment contracts of Metropolitan police civil staff. A review has been conducted of headquarters support services covering 5,000 staff. Following a two-month consultation period, proposals for a range of efficiency savings, including contracting-out services covering some 2,000 posts, have been approved by the Metropolitan police policy board. Contracts are expected to be let by mid 1998. Detailed implementation costs are not yet available.

Charity Collections

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many (i) prosecutions and (ii) convictions there have been, in each of the last three years for which figures are available, for breaches of licensing rules on street and house-to-house charity collections in *(a)* the Metropolitan police district, *(b)* the City of London police district, *(c)* for each other area in the United Kingdom and *(d)* in total; and if he will make a statement. [8884]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* Information collected centrally does not identify individual offences committed under the Police Factories etc. (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1916 and the House to House Collections Act 1939 from other summary offences.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to require each police station in the Metropolitan police district to be supplied with a regular list of street collection licences in that area; and if he will make a statement. [8886]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that police stations within the Metropolitan police district are routinely informed of all authorised charitable street collections in their area.

Charity Fraud

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a statistical breakdown of prosecutions and convictions for charity fraud offences in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [8885]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* The information is not available centrally.

Immigration Detainees

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are currently detained for immigration purposes; what is the longest period of detention; how many people detained for immigration purposes have, over each of the last three years, obtained bail; what procedures exist under which a person detained for immigration purposes may apply for bail; and if he will make a statement [9176]

Mr. Kirkhope *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* The latest information relates to 31 October 1996 when 1,033 persons were detained solely under Immigration Act powers in Prison Service establishments or Immigration Service detention centres. The longest period of detention at that time was 75 months and related to a person since released whose case was awaiting a decision from the European Court of Human Rights. Statistics on detainees who obtained bail are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. With certain limited exceptions, anyone who is detained can apply for bail. An application can be made to a chief immigration officer, a police inspector or an immigration adjudicator.

WALES

"New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans"

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what costs quoted in the document, "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans", were prepared in his Department; what detailed assumptions and interpretations were provided to officials in his Department to enable preparation of each cost; and what was the total cost to public funds of preparing each estimate. [6347]

Mr. Hague: The estimate of the cost of establishing the Welsh Assembly published in "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" was made by me. It is not the normal practice to keep a record of the time spent in providing factual information to Ministers and it is not therefore possible to offer a reliable estimate of the costs involved.

Energy Advisers

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made in meeting the commitment laid down in the energy plan for Wales published in 1989 of establishing a network of energy advisers over the Principality. [8696]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Welsh Office's Energy and Environment Office has a network of five energy advisers across Wales who provide free, impartial advice during site visits. The advisers are continually trained and developed to provide businesses and other organisations with effective advice on the efficient use of energy.

Prescribed Drugs (Adverse Effects)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people *(a)* were prescribed and *(b)* took the steroid Prednisolone in Wales in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9643]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information collected centrally relates to the number of prescription items dispensed. Available information shows that there were 610,750 prescriptions, excluding drugs used in hospitals, dispensed for Prednisolone between June 1994 and July 1996. This does not, however, indicate the number of people being prescribed or taking the drug as one person can have more than one prescription dispensed during the period in question.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people have *(a)* become crippled and *(b)* died from taking the steroid Prednisolone in Wales in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9642]

Mr. Jones: Information on the number of people crippled by taking Prednisolone is not available centrally. There were no deaths, as a result of taking Prednisolone, recorded in Wales between 1993 and 1995—the only years for which these data are readily available.

Medical Procedures (Complications)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate *(a)* how many people and *(b)* the percentage of people who have been admitted to hospital as a direct result of complications after (i) surgery and (ii) medicinal treatment in Wales in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9644]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Due to the complexity of the data analysis required, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

St. David's Medical Centre, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what official engagement the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) had with Mr. Dusan Bako and Dr. Angelina Bako and others at the St. David's Medical Centre, Pentwyn drive, Pentwyn, Cardiff on Monday 9 December. [9505]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: None.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date his Department *(a)* set and *(b)* informed the parties of the date of the oral hearing into the inclusion of Triocare in the list at the St. David's Medical Centre, Pentwyn drive, Pentwyn, Cardiff under the NHS Pharmaceutical Regulations 1992. [9504]

Mr. Hague: My officials are presently in the process of setting the date of the oral hearing and informing all parties.

Objective 2 Status

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent consultations he has had with the member of the European Commission responsible for regional affairs concerning objective 2 status for industrial south Wales. [9506]

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North met the European Commissioner responsible for Regional Affairs on 6 December when they discussed the successor objective 2 single programming document for industrial south Wales.

Public Expenditure Statement Leak

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the outcome of the inquiry that he has set up into the leaking to the press on Tuesday 10 December of the contents of his statement on the 1997–98 Welsh Office budget. [9507]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the statement that I made to the House on Thursday 12 December, *Official Report*, column *412*. I will keep him informed about the progress of the inquiry and will let him know the outcome when the investigation is complete.

Legislation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many items of legislation relating to his Department have been repealed since January 1994; how many statutory instruments were introduced during the same period; and how many of the latter were *(a)* deregulatory and *(b)* fee orders. [9372]

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

New Health Authorities

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his 1996 departmental report, Cm 3215, page 79, if he will make a statement on progress in achieving the savings of £8 million arising from the setting up of the five new health authorities. [9508]

Mr. Hague: The savings targets of the five unified health authorities, established on 1 April this year, are linked to full implementation of all related charges and I expect to see savings achieved in 1998–99. Progress towards the targets will be monitored through the health authority annual accounts.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 18 December 1996

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Workplace (Fire Precautions) Regulations

Sir Donald Thompson: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what representations he has received from the British Retail Consortium concerning the proposed Workplace (Fire Precautions) Regulations; and what estimate he has made of the cost to retailers, particularly small businesses, of the proposed regulations. [9138]

Mr. Freeman: I refer to the reply given on 11 December, *Official Report*, columns *263–64*, by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), to the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall).

My right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Blatch, Minister of State, Home Office, and I recently also had a meeting with representatives of the British Retail Consortium to discuss the possible implementation costs for the retail trade in complying with the proposed Workplace (Fire Precautions) Regulations. We visited two retail outlets with the British Retail Consortium, a fire service inspector and a fire prevention officer to assess at first hand possible implementation costs. I propose to visit further outlets in due course to gain further information for myself and colleagues. The Home Office will use the results, together with views from other businesses, in preparing a compliance cost assessment, which will accompany the proposed regulations.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Millennium Projects

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what steps she has taken to ensure that submitted millennium projects which meet the Millennium Commission's published criteria are objectively assessed to determine their distinctiveness; and how she defines distinctive in relation to millennium projects; [7422]

(2) which of the criteria for the proposal stage of the Millennium Commission's round 3 the Dreaming 2000 project failed to meet; and what differences there were between the criteria for the application stage of round 2 and the proposal stage of round 3; [7708]

(3) how the Millennium Commission ensures that its criteria are applied consistently in decisions on bids; and if she will make a statement; [7710]

(4) if she will make a statement on the factors underlying the Millennium Commission chief executive's rejection of the Dreaming 2000 project; [7705]

(5) what assessment she has made of the advantage of millennium proposals which involve schools taking responsibility for conservation projects; and if she will make a statement. [7707]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: These are matters for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission, and place copies of my replies in the Libraries of the House.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what estimate she has made of the latest date for a start on the millennium dome in order to ensure completion and fitting out before 31 December 1999. [9433]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I shall write to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission, and place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Sports Council

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what progress is being made on the restructuring of the Sports Council. [10425]

Mr. Sproat: Letters patent under the Great Seal granting royal charters of incorporation to the United Kingdom Sports Council and the English Sports Council were made on 19 September 1996. The United Kingdom Sports Council and the English Sports Council will become fully operational form 1 January 1997, subject to the legal transfer to the new bodies of the assets and liabilities of the Great Britain Sports Council. From that date, the United Kingdom Sports Council and the English Sports Council will receive a parliamentary grant from class X, vote I, to provide services and support for the benefit of sport and physical activities.

The English Sports Council will become responsible from 1 January 1997 for the distribution in England of lottery proceeds for expenditure on or connected with sport.

Television Relay Building Programme

Sir James Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what are the conclusions of her review of the ultra-high frequency television relay building programme; and if she will make a statement. [10295]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The announcement made on 16 April 1991 by the then Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), *Official Report*, column *131*, explained that the Government had agreed with the BBC and Independent Television Commission that the programme of building 25 ultra-high frequency relay stations a year to extend UHF television coverage would be maintained until 1996 when its further continuation would be reconsidered. I have now undertaken that consideration in close consultation with the Independent Television Commission and the BBC, which have jointly administered the relay building programme to date.

[1] Media schedules and costs have still to be finalised.
[2] The figures given are indicative. Final costs will be dictated by the frequency of the campaign which will be triggered by severe weather conditions.
[3] Historic Scotland.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much his Department has spent on promotional or public information campaigns in each of the last five years; and how much he estimates will be spent on these campaigns during the (i) current and (ii) next financial years. [7536]

Mr. Forsyth: Details of expenditure on promotional or public information campaigns by my Department in each of the last five years, and estimated spend for the current and next financial year is as follows:

Spend for each of the last five years	£
1991–92	1,220,000
1992–93	1,366,000
1993–94	1,058,000
1994–95	1,682,000
1995–96	1,819,000
Estimated spend for current financial year	
1996–97	[1] 1,860,000
1996–97	[2] 1,350,000
Estimated spend for financial year	
1997–98	[3] 2,000,000

[1] This figure is the original estimate based on spend to date and proposed spend to the end of the financial year.
[2] This figure is an additional estimate based on spend to date and proposed spend for three new public information campaigns running in the latter part of the current financial year: tackling violent crime, food hygiene awareness and severe weather warning.
[3] Costs are estimated figures only. Departmental budgets for next financial year have not yet been agreed.

Locate in Scotland

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total grant made by the Scottish Office to Locate in Scotland; and how much of this grant was spent in advertising in England to encourage companies to relocate in Scotland in the last year for which information is available. [8105]

Mr. Kynoch: In 1995–96 Locate in Scotland had a total budget of £8.9 million, none of which was spent on advertising to encourage companies in England to relocate to Scotland.

EU Institutions (Scottish Interests)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the means by which the Government ensure that Scottish interests are effectively represented in the institutions of the European Union. [8934]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Scottish interests are effectively represented to the institutions of the European Union by being incorporated into the view of the United Kingdom. I am able to ensure that this is the case by my attendance at Cabinet, and at Cabinet Committees which discuss UK policy on EU issues. In addition, Scottish Office Ministers attend Council meetings as part of the UK delegation and when matters relevant to my responsibilities as Secretary of State are discussed. As at 11 December, Scottish Office Ministers have attended 13 Councils during the current year.

Nominations by the Government have ensured that five of the total of 24 UK members of the Committee of the Regions serve in Scottish local authorities, that the current UK judge in the Court of Justice is Scottish, and that two members of the Economic and Social Committee are Scots. My hon. Friend will be aware that Scotland is already served by eight MEPs, of whom one is a Vice President of the European Parliament. These arrangements ensure that Scottish interests are effectively represented in the institutions, and the advisory committees, of the European Union.

Prisoner Assaults

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were prisoner-on-prisoner assault rates in Scottish prisons in the most recent period for which figures are available. [8943]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Mr. John McFall, dated 17 December 1996:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your question relating to the number of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults in Scottish prisons in the most recent period for which figures are available.

The most recent published figures are set out on page 9 of the Scottish Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts for 1995–96 (HMSO Cm 508). There were 108 such serious assaults. The figure for 1996–97 will be published in the Annual Report for that year in July 1997.

Landfill Tax (Exemptions)

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he proposes to permit a temporary exemption to landfill tax for those local authorities who have to dispose of unsold paper for recycling, having collected the paper to meet the Government's target for recycling waste by 2000. [8920]

Mr. Kynoch: The scope of the tax is a matter for consideration by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Erskine Bridge

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the location of the gas and water pipes on the Erskine bridge; and what assessment the Health and Safety Executive has made of them. [9071]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Two water pipes and one gas pipe are situated on each side of the Erskine Bridge, in the open, underneath the footways. The structure was designed to accommodate these services and they have been in place since the bridge opened in 1971.

Following an incident on 4 August 1996 when an oilrig platform collided with the bridge, the pipes were inspected by the undertakers responsible and minor repairs carried out.

No specific assessment of the pipes has been made by the Health and Safety Executive although it has made a number of visits to the bridge since the incident in connection with the main structural repairs.

Legislation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many items of legislation relating to this Department have been repealed since January 1994; how many statutory instruments were introduced during the same period; and how many of the latter were *(a)* deregulatory and *(b)* fee orders. [9367]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General.

Island of Coll (Fuel)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to provide short-term emergency fuel supplies to the island of Coll. [9277]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office has no immediate plans to provide emergency fuel supplies to the island of Coll. However, arrangements for doing so have been the subject of discussions between the emergency planning unit of the Scottish Office, the local council, local suppliers and the Army.

Mr. Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with Argyll and Bute Council about the need for short-term emergency fuel supplies for the island of Coll. [9278]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The emergency planning branch of the Scottish Office has been regularly in touch with Argyll and Bute emergency planning unit about the fuel shortage on the island of Coll. Discussions have taken place about the options for the delivery and dispensing of fuel by commercial sources and by the Army. Argyll and Bute council have deployed a diesel-powered vehicle to the island to help with transport problems.

Local Government

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the size of each local authority area in square miles or kilometres. [9394]

Mr. Kynoch: The land area of each Scottish local authority was given in "The New Councils" published by the Government Statistical Service in May 1995 as follows:

	Km²
Aberdeen city	186
Aberdeenshire	6,318
Angus	2,181
Argyll and Bute	6,930
Clackmannanshire	157
Dumfries and Galloway	6,439
Dundee city	65
East Ayrshire	1,252
East Dumbartonshire	172
East Lothian	678
East Renfrewshire	173
Edinburgh, city of	262
Falkirk	299
Fife	1,323
Glasgow city	175
Highland	25,784
Inverclyde	162
Midlothian	356
Moray	2,238
North Ayrshire	884
North Lanarkshire	474
Orkney Islands	992
Perth and Kinross	5,311
Renfrewshire	261
Scottish Borders	4,734
Shetland Islands	1,438
South Ayrshire	1,202
South Lanarkshire	1,771
Stirling	2,196
West Dunbartonshire	162
Western Isles	3,133
West Lothian	425

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* proposals and *(b)* appeals were submitted in each local authority area as a consequence of the introduction of council tax on 1 April 1993. [9398]

Mr. Kynoch: The available information relates to all classes of proposal to change the valuation list made to assessors and subsequent appeals. Information on proposals/appeals in relation to the valuation list in force at 1 April 1993 is available only for regions. Information on proposals/appeals in relation to the list after 1 April 1993 is available only for valuation board areas. The latest available information, giving the position up to September 1996, is given in the tables.

Proposals/appeals in relation to the list in force on 1 April 1993.

		Disposal of proposals/appeals				
			Valuation appeal committee activities			
Region area	*Number of proposals/appeals*[1]	*Settled before citation*[2]	*Cited to be heard by VAC*	*Settled before VAC hearing*	*Heard and resolved by VAC*	*Cited and not yet determined*
Scotland	98,441	77,721	20,589	15,382	5,140	67
Central	3,295	3,040	222	103	107	12
Dumfries and Galloway	3,054	2,312	742	559	183	0
Fife	6,722	6,076	646	520	126	0
Grampian	11,211	8,942	2,269	1,425	836	8
Highland and Western Isles	6,908	4,889	2,019	1,259	755	5
Lothian	12,619	8,841	3,757	3,248	499	10
Orkney and Shetland	384	309	75	46	29	0

Millennium Exhibition

Mr. Bendall: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement on the millennium exhibition. [10477]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At its meeting on 11 December, the Millennium Commission confirmed its decision to proceed with the national exhibition at Greenwich in the year 2000. The commission is now finalising the means by which the exhibition will be delivered within an acceptable budget.

Good progress has also been made on a number of other fronts: the planning application was submitted to the London borough of Greenwich as planned on 31 October and a decision is expected by the end of January. The Highways Agency announced on 15 November that the last two contracts for the M11-A12 link road have been awarded: the road will be completed in 1999 and will enable optimum use of the park-and-ride facilities planned for the exhibition. Work on the Jubilee line extension, which will provide easy access by underground from central London into the centre of the exhibition site, is progressing well, with the new line scheduled to open in 1998. On 22 November, English Partnerships announced that it had agreed terms with British Gas to acquire the Greenwich peninsula. Meanwhile, statutory decontamination works by British Gas are well under way.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Solicitors' Charges

Mr. Parry: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many complaints have been made to the Law Society concerning solicitors' charges to clients between 1993 and 1996; and if he will make a statement. [9769]

Mr. Streeter: This is a matter for the Law Society.

Legal Aid

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many recipients of legal aid there have been; and how many applications have been refused in Darlington in each year since 1990. [9740]

Mr. Streeter: The total number of acts of assistance granted for civil and criminal legal aid was as follows:

1990–91: 2,609,509

1991–92: 3,045,456

1992–93: 3,305,699

1993–94: 3,500,402

1994–95: 3,512,451

1995–96: 3,469,368.

It is not possible to identify separately applications for legal aid received from Darlington; these applications are dealt with by the Legal Aid Board area office in Newcastle, which covers the country from North Yorkshire to Northumberland and parts of Cumbria.

Figures for the total number of applications received and refused for civil legal aid by the Newcastle area office are available since 1992–93 only. These were as follows:

Year	*Total applications*	*Applications refused*
1992–93	35,963	9,042
1993–94	35,672	9,563
1994–95	34,929	10,578
1995–96	32,672	9,821
Total	139,236	39,004

Applications for criminal legal aid are dealt with by the courts. Equivalent figures for applications made prior to 1992–93 and for criminal legal aid are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Staff

Mr. Hain: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* non-permanent staff there have been in (i) his Department and (ii) executive agencies of his Department in each year since 1992. [9626]

Mr. Streeter: The tables give details of the information requested for staff employed in the Lord Chancellor's Department headquarters and associated offices, and in the executive agencies for which the Lord Chancellor is accountable to Parliament.

	Permanent	*Non-permanent*
LCD Headquarters and Associated Offices[1]		
1992	1,088	5
1993	1,162	22
1994	1,207	39
1995	867	33
1996	864	81
Public Trust Office		
1992	585	0
1993	564	0
1994	548	1
1995	555	1
1996	557	13
Court Service[2]		
1992	11,033	n/a
1993	10,911	n/a
1994	10,639	n/a
1995	10,612	n/a
1996	10,077	645
Public Record Office[3]		
1992	456	3.5
1993	460	31
1994	486	32
1995	452	27
1996	470	27
Land Registry		
1992	9,850	15
1993	9,503	13
1994	9,145	1
1995	8,816	2
1996	8,539	1

	Permanent	Non-permanent
Northern Ireland Court Service		
1992	660.5	1
1993	675.5	1
1994	681	26
1995	656	28
1996	643	27.5

[1] All the figures given for non-permanent staff in LCD Headquarters and the Associated Offices include staff on renewable and unrenewable fixed term contracts. No central record of casual staff in this area was kept prior to 1996.
[2] No central record of the number of non-permanent staff for the Court Service was kept prior to 1996.
[3] Permanent figures for the Public Record Office include a small proportion—not exceeding 8 per cent.—of fixed-term jobs. Separate figures are not kept and the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Ombudsman Service

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviornment what plans he has to enhance the powers of the local government ombudsman to ensure that local authorities comply with the findings of the ombudsman; and if he will make a statement. [8916]

Mr. Curry: In his final report on the civil justice system in England and Wales, "Access to Justice", Lord Woolf proposed that the remedies recommended by ombudsmen should be enforceable through the courts. As I explained in the paper "Government Response to the Financial and Management and Policy Review of the Commission for Local Administration in England", which I announced in an answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) on 28 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *333*, and placed in the Library, consideration of Lord Woolf's recommendations on ombudsmen is being postponed for the time being while my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor concentrates on implementing the major elements of Lord Woolf's proposals.

Coal Mines (Accidents)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many major injuries occurred in United Kingdom coal mines during 1995–96; and if he will list the dates of the accidents and the mines they occurred in. [9297]

Sir Paul Beresford: The number of major injuries reported to HM inspectorate of mines occurring in UK coal mines for 1 January 1995 to 27 November 1996 was 307.

The information relating to the date of each injury and coal mine is as follows:

Mine name	Date
Welbeck	95.01.03
Asfordby	95.01.04
Asfordby	95.01.06
Kellingley	95.01.08
New Daw Mill	95.01.10
Wistow	95.01.17
Clipstone	95.01.17
Longannet	95.01.17
North Selby	95.01.21
Stillingfleet	95.01.24
Calverton	95.01.24
Prince of Wales	95.01.25
Riccall	95.01.28
Longannet	95.02.02
Harworth	95.02.08
Kellingley	95.02.09
Calverton	95.02.13
Pentreclwydau South	95.02.13
Prince of Wales	95.02.14
Maltby	95.02.22
Calverton	95.02.23
Maltby	95.02.23
Bilsthorpe	95.03.03
Markham Main	95.03.06
Riccall	95.03.07
Asfordby	95.03.09
Kellingley	95.03.13
Whittle	95.03.14
Dynant Fach No. 2 Mine	95.03.14
Longannet	95.03.16
Whittle	95.03.16
Thoresby	95.03.20
Harworth	95.03.26
Whitemoor	95.04.02
Clipstone	95.04.04
Longannett	95.04.04
Prince of Wales	95.04.06
Thoresby	95.04.09
Thoresby	95.04.10
North Selby	95.04.12
Kellingley	95.04.13
Kellingley	95.04.14
Longannett	95.04.18
Maltby	95.04.22
Wistow	95.04.26
Gascoigne Wood	95.04.28
Maltby	95.04.29
Whitemoor	95.04.30
New Point of Ayr	95.05.01
Maltby	95.05.05
Thoresby	95.05.10
Kellingley	95.05.13
Wistow	95.05.17
Clipstone	95.05.18
Prince of Wales	95.05.19
Backshot	95.05.19
Byrnant Varteg Mine	95.05.19
North Selby	95.05.20
Prince of Wales	95.05.21
Whitemoor	95.05.22
Markham Main	95.05.24
Cwmgwili Mine	95.05.27
Prince of Wales	95.05.31
Thoresby	95.06.02
Bilsthorpe	95.06.05
North Selby	95.06.08
New Point of Ayr	95.06.08
Bilsthorpe	95.06.12
Ellington Combine	95.06.12
Riccall	95.06.13
North Selby	95.06.14
Bilsthorpe	95.06.21
Riccall	95.06.21
New Point of Ayr	95.06.21
New Daw Mill	95.06.23
Riccall	95.06.24
Whitemoor	95.06.25
New Point of Ayr	95.06.26
Ellington Combine	95.06.29
New Daw Mill	95.06.29
Harworth	95.07.03

Mine name	Date
Whittle	95.07.03
Hifynydd Mine	95.07.04
Clipstone	95.07.07
New Betws	95.07.13
Harworth	95.07.13
Bilsthorpe	95.07.16
Backshot	95.07.24
Stillingfleet	95.07.24
Whitemoor	95.07.28
Rossington	95.07.30
Blenkinsopp Castle	95.07.31
Gascoigne Wood	95.08.06
Maltby	95.08.07
Rossington	95.08.18
New Daw Mill	95.08.19
Wistow	95.08.21
Stillingfleet	95.08.24
Hatfield	95.08.25
Ellington Combine	95.08.26
Kellingley	95.08.28
Wistow	95.08.29
New Coventry	95.09.01
Ellington Combine	95.09.05
Thoresby	95.09.06
Riccall	95.09.07
Thoresby	95.09.11
Thoresby	95.09.14
Hatfield	95.09.19
Clipstone	95.09.19
Kellingley	95.09.20
Clipstone	95.09.26
New Point of Ayr	95.10.01
Whitemoor	95.10.03
Hatfield	95.10.03
New Point of Ayr	95.10.03
New Hem Heath	95.10.09
New Coventry	95.10.11
New Daw Mill	95.10.13
Harworth	95.10.14
New Coventry	95.10.14
North Selby	95.10.17
Stillingfleet	95.10.17
Harworth	95.10.23
Markham Main	95.10.23
Stillingfleet	95.10.24
Maltby	95.10.24
New Coventry	95.10.30
New Daw Mill	95.11.01
Annesley Bentinck	95.11.03
Prince of Wales	95.11.09
Maltby	95.11.16
Longannet	95.11.16
Calverton	95.11.17
Maltby	95.11.17
Maltby	95.11.17
Kellingley	95.11.18
Longannet	95.11.20
New Betws	95.11.21
North Selby	95.11.28
New Tower	95.11.28
Penllwyn Colliery	95.11.30
Kellingley	95.12.03
Clipstone	95.12.04
New Point of Ayr	95.12.04
Ellington Combine	95.12.05
Riccall	95.12.09
Ellington Combine	95.12.18
Markham Main	95.12.19
Markham Main	95.12.19
Asfordby	95.12.21
New Silverdale	95.12.21
Tyn Wern Mine	95.12.22
Riccall	95.12.28
New Daw Mill	96.01.03

Mine name	Date
Whittle	96.01.05
Bilsthorpe	96.01.05
Markham Main	96.01.06
Thoresby	96.01.06
Bilsthorpe	96.01.08
New Silverdale	96.01.11
Prince of Wales	96.01.12
North Selby	96.01.16
Harworth	96.01.17
Ellington Combine	96.01.19
North Selby	96.01.19
North Selby	96.01.23
Longannet	96.02.02
New Hem Heath	96.02.02
Maltby	96.02.11
North Selby	96.02.16
Annesley Bentinck	96.02.16
New Daw Mill	96.02.17
North Selby	96.02.19
New Hem Heath	96.02.20
Annesley Bentinck	96.02.21
Stillingfleet	96.02.22
New Betws	96.02.28
Thoresby	96.03.04
New Daw Mill	96.03.04
New Coventry	96.03.05
Whitemoor	96.03.09
Calverton	96.03.13
Forest No. 3 Mine	96.03.17
Kellingley	96.03.17
Maltby	96.03.18
Maltby	96.03.20
Whitemoor	96.03.21
New Daw Mill	96.03.21
Wistow	96.03.22
Thoresby	96.03.22
New Silverdale	96.03.26
Park Drift	96.04.01
Thoresby	96.04.02
Harworth	96.04.04
Thoresby	96.04.11
North Selby	96.04.12
Maltby	96.04.16
Annesley Bentinck	96.04.18
Monktonhall LM	96.04.18
New Hem Heath	96.04.18
Whitemoor	96.04.19
Whitemoor	96.04.21
Wistow	96.04.22
North Selby	96.04.23
Kellingley	96.04.24
Stillingfleet	96.04.26
Clipstone	96.04.27
Stillingfleet	96.05.05
Annesley Bentinck	96.05.07
New Daw Mill	96.05.07
Tyne Wern Mine	96.05.12
Thoresby	96.05.20
Riccall/Whitemoor Co.	96.05.21
Welbeck	96.05.21
Thoresby	96.05.22
Wistow/Gascoigne Wood	96.05.23
Longannet	96.05.24
Monktonhall LM	96.05.26
Stillingfleet	96.05.28
North Selby	96.05.28
Riccall/Whitemoor Co.	96.06.01
Calverton	96.06.04
Harworth	96.06.05
Ellington Combine	96.06.05
Welbeck	96.06.06
Hatfield	96.06.10
Wistow/Gascoigne Wood	96.06.10
Stillingfleet	96.06.11

Mine name	Date
Asfordby	96.06.12
Harworth	96.06.14
Harworth	96.06.14
New Hem Heath	96.06.14
Forest No. 3 Mine	96.06.15
Welbeck	96.06.17
Prince of Wales	96.06.18
New Point of Ayr	96.06.20
Bilsthorpe	96.06.21
Aberpergwm Mine	96.06.21
Prince of Wales	96.06.25
Wistow/Gascoigne Wood	96.06.27
Monktonhall LM	96.06.28
Stillingfleet	96.07.04
Ellington Combine	96.07.05
Monktonhall LM	96.07.07
Thoresby	96.07.08
Clipstone	96.07.11
Harworth	96.07.12
Harworth	96.07.13
New Silverdale	96.07.15
Welbeck	96.07.18
Annesley Bentinck	96.07.20
Eckington	96.07.25
Riccall/Whitemoor Co.	96.07.25
Thoresby	96.07.28
New Tower	96.07.30
Asfordby	96.08.01
Longannet	96.08.14
North Selby	96.08.20
Maltby	96.08.25
Ellington Combine	96.08.27
New Silverdale	96.08.29
New Daw Mill	96.08.30
Bilsthorpe	96.09.03
Rossington	96.09.05
Little Sheriff	96.09.05
New Daw Mill	96.09.05
Welbeck	96.09.09
Welbeck	96.09.18
Welbeck	96.09.18
North Selby	96.09.18
Riccall/Whitemoor Co.	96.09.21
Wistow/Gascoigne Wood	96.09.23
Maltby	96.09.23
Wistow/Gascoigne Wood	96.09.24
Longannet	96.09.24
Monktonhall LM	96.09.27
Thoresby	96.09.30
New Daw Mill	96.10.02
Kellingley	96.10.10
Clipstone	96.10.10
New Daw Mill	96.10.12
Riccall/Whitemoor Co.	96.10.15
Riccall/Whitemoor Co.	96.10.16
Monktonhall LM	96.10.16
Pentreclwydau South	96.10.16
Wistow/Gascoigne Wood	96.10.18
Thoresby	96.10.22
Longannet	96.10.22
North Selby	96.10.23
Kellingley	96.10.26
Prince of Wales	96.10.31
Rossington	96.11.01
Eckington	96.11.05
Welbeck	96.11.07
Pentreclwydau South	96.11.08
Thoresby	96.11.10
Maltby	96.11.11
Annesley Bentinck	96.11.13
New Tower	96.11.14
Longannet	96.11.15
North Selby	96.11.18
Hatfield	96.11.20
Riccall/Whitemoor Co.	96.11.20
Wistow/Gascoigne Wood	96.11.23
Harworth	96.11.27
Thoresby	96.11.27

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the major injuries reported under the requirements of the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 for United Kingdom coal mines for the year April 1995 to March 1996. [10151]

Sir Paul Beresford: The list of major injuries reported to HM inspectorate of mines occurring in UK coal mines for 1 April 1995 to 31 March 1996 is as follows:

Mine name	Date
Whitemoor	95.04.02
Clipstone	95.04.04
Longannet	95.04.04
Prince of Wales	95.04.06
Thoresby	95.04.09
Thoresby	95.04.10
North Selby	95.04.12
Kellingley	95.04.13
Kellingley	95.04.14
Longannet	95.04.18
Maltby	95.04.22
Wistow	95.04.26
Gascoigne Wood	95.04.28
Maltby	95.04.29
Whitemoor	95.04.30
New Point of Ayr	95.05.01
Maltby	95.05.05
Thoresby	95.05.10
Kellingley	95.05.13
Wistow	95.05.17
Clipstone	95.05.18
Prince of Wales	95.05.19
Backshot	95.05.19
Bymant Varteg Mine	95.05.19
North Selby	95.05.20
Prince of Wales	95.05.21
Whitemoor	95.05.22
Markham Main	95.05.24
Cwmgwili Mine	95.05.27
Prince of Wales	95.05.31
Thoresby	95.06.02
Bilsthorpe	95.06.05
North Selby	95.06.08
New Point of Ayr	95.06.08
Bilsthorpe	95.06.12
Ellington Combine	95.06.12
Ricall	95.06.13
North Selby	95.06.14
Bilsthorpe	95.06.21
Riccall	95.06.21
New Point of Ayr	95.06.21
New Daw Mill	95.06.23
Riccall	95.06.24
Whitemoor	95.06.25
New Point of Ayr	95.06.26
Ellington Combine	95.06.29
New Daw Mill	95.06.29
Harworth	95.07.03
Whittle	05.07.03
Hirfynydd Mine	95.07.04
Clipstone	95.07.07
New Betws	95.07.13
Harworth	95.07.13

Mine name	Date
Bilsthorpe	95.07.16
Backshot	95.07.24
Stillingfleet	95.07.24
Whitemoor	95.07.28
Rossington	95.07.30
Blenkinsopp Castle	95.07.31
Gascoigne Wood	95.08.06
Maltby	95.08.07
Rossington	95.08.18
New Daw Mill	95.08.19
Wistow	95.08.21
Stillingfleet	95.08.24
Hatfield	95.08.25
Ellington Combine	95.08.26
Kellingley	95.08.28
Wistow	95.08.29
New Coventry	95.09.01
Ellington Combine	95.09.05
Thoresby	95.09.06
Riccall	95.09.07
Thoresby	95.09.11
Thoresby	95.09.14
Hatfield	95.09.19
Clipstone	95.09.19
Kellingley	95.09.20
Clipstone	95.09.26
New Point of Ayr	95.10.01
Whitemoor	95.10.03
Hatfield	95.10.03
New Point of Ayr	95.10.03
New Hem Heath	95.10.09
New Coventry	95.10.11
New Daw Mill	95.10.13
Harworth	95.10.14
New Coventry	95.10.14
North Selby	95.10.17
Stillingfleet	95.10.17
Harworth	95.10.23
Markham Main	95.10.23
Stillingfleet	95.10.24
Maltby	95.10.24
New Coventry	95.10.30
New Daw Mill	95.11.01
Annlesley Bentinck	95.11.03
Prince of Wales	95.11.09
Maltby	95.11.16
Longannet	95.11.16
Calverton	95.11.17
Maltby	95.11.17
Maltby	95.11.17
Kellingley	95.11.18
Longannet	95.11.20
New Betws	95.11.21
North Selby	95.11.28
New Tower	95.11.28
Penllwyn Colliery	95.11.30
Kellingley	95.12.03
Clipstone	95.12.04
New Point of Ayr	95.12.04
Ellington Combine	95.12.05
Riccall	95.12.09
Ellington Combine	95.12.18
Markham Main	95.12.19
Markham Main	95.12.19
Asfordby	95.12.21
New Silverdale	95.12.21
Tyn Wern Mine	95.12.22
Riccall	95.12.28
New Daw Mill	96.01.03
Whittle	96.01.05
Bilsthorpe	96.01.05
Markham Main	96.01.06
Thoresby	96.01.06
Bilsthorpe	96.01.08
New Silverdale	96.01.11
Prince of Wales	96.01.12
North Selby	96.01.16
Harworth	96.01.17
Ellington Combine	96.01.19
North Selby	96.01.19
North Selby	96.01.23
Longannet	96.02.02
New Hem Heath	96.02.02
Maltby	96.02.11
North Selby	96.02.16
Annesley Bentinck	96.02.16
New Daw Mill	96.02.17
North Selby	96.02.19
New Hem Heath	96.02.20
Annesley Bentinck	96.02.21
Stillingfleet	96.02.22
New Betws	96.02.28
Thoresby	96.03.04
New Daw Mill	96.03.04
New Coventry	96.03.05
Whitemoor	96.03.09
Calverton	96.03.13
Forest No. 3 Mine	96.03.14
Kellingley	96.03.17
Maltby	96.03.18
Maltby	96.03.20
Whitemoor	96.03.21
New Daw Mill	96.03.21
Wistow	96.03.22
Thoresby	96.03.22
New Silverdale	96.03.26

Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what restrictions are placed on the Health and Safety Executive in respect of providing information to local authorities on accidents at THORP without the consent of British Nuclear Fuels plc. [9146]

Sir Paul Beresford: The Health and Safety Executive may release such information to an officer of a local authority authorised to receive it, where HSE has acquired the information under statutory requirements. However, HSE would normally make the information available only if there was a health and safety purpose in doing so.

Section 28 of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 contains restrictions on the release of information obtained under statutory requirements or in the exercise of inspectors' powers. Associations of local authorities, unlike individual local authorities, do not fall within the exemptions from these restrictions.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he made of the health and safety consequences of incidents *(a)* during the construction of THORP at Sellafield and *(b)* since it commenced operational activity. [9145]

Sir Paul Beresford: Conditions attached to the Sellafield nuclear site licence require BNFL to have arrangements in place to investigate and report incidents at THORP to HSE's nuclear installations inspectorate. These apply throughout the lifetime of the plant, including the construction stage. Additional arrangements exist to comply with other regulations, such as the Reporting of

Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 relating to non-nuclear incident reporting.

The HSE routinely monitors BNFL's arrangements including the conduct of its investigations, and carries out separate investigations where appropriate, which take into account the health and safety consequences of the particular incident. Significant incidents are reported in the HSE's quarterly statements of nuclear incidents.

Radiation (Sellafield)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what requests British Nuclear Fuels plc has made to his Department for permission to increase the levels of radiation released into the atmosphere from its plant at Sellafield. [9143]

Mr. Clappison: No requests have been made to this Department. However, British Nuclear Fuels has applied to the Environment Agency for a variation to its current certificates of authorisation under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 to dispose of waste gases, mists and dusts from premises on its Sellafield site.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what levels of radiation have been released into the atmosphere from the BNFL plant at Sellafield in each of the last five years; and what are the current levels. [9144]

Mr. Clappison: Information about air-borne discharges of radioactivity in past years from British Nuclear Fuels' Sellafield site is contained in the company's "Annual Report on Radioactive Discharges and Monitoring of the Environment", the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's "Radioactivity in Food and the Environment" and the Department of the Environment's "Digest of Environmental Statistics". Copies of all these are available in the Library of the House.

Details of current discharges are contained in public registers held by the Environment Agency and local authorities in the area. The information may be obtained from the Environment Agency at Mitre house, Church street, Lancaster, LA1 1BQ.

Health and Safety Commission

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which appointments to the Health and Safety Commission lapse before 1 May 1997; on what dates; and if he will consult Her Majesty's Opposition before making the new appointments. [9571]

Sir Paul Beresford: Two appointments to the commission lapse on 31 March 1997. Any new appointments will be made in accordance with the extensive consultation requirements set out in section 10(3)(c) of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974; and with the guidance issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The Secretary of State has no plans to consult on the appointments beyond that.

Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for his Department *(a)* how many people in total are employed, *(b)* how many of the total number of staff are (i) male and (ii) female and *(c)* how many (I) men and (II) women are employed on a (1) full-time and (2) part-time basis. [9492]

Sir Paul Beresford: The figures for the Department of the Environment and its executive agencies are given in the table:

	Male	*Female*	*Total*
Department of the Environment			
Full-time	2,098	1,414	3,512
Part-time	30	280	310
Total	2,128	1,694	3,822
The Planning Inspectorate			
Full-time	429	211	640
Part-time	10	30	40
Total	439	241	680
Building Research Establishment			
Full-time	435	182	617
Part-time	5	68	73
Total	440	250	690
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre			
Full-time	28	27	55
Part-time	0	0	0
Total	28	27	55
Health and Safety Executive			
Full-time	2,429	1,599	4,028
Part-time	21	397	418
Total	2,450	1,996	4,446

The figures are taken from the Department of the Environment's Staff On-Line Information System (SOLIS) and the Health and Safety Executive's Personnel information database (PRIMA). Other figures were supplied by the relevant executive agencies. The figures show the actual numbers of staff-in-post for December 1996 except for Health and Safety Executive—these figures are for 1 April 1996.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* non-permanent staff there have been in (i) his Department and (ii) executive agencies of his Department in each year since 1992. [9624]

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I sent on 3 December 1996 in response to his previous named day question for Monday 25 November.

The figures supplied in the annexe to that reply provide the following sub-totals:

	1 April 1992	*1 April 1993*	*1 April 1994*	*1 April 1995*	*1 April 1996*
Department of the Environment					
Permanent	4,244	4,599	4,236	3,973	3,632
Non-Permanent	237	223	293	300	268
Building Research Establishment					
Permanent	654	638	646	670	622
Non-Permanent	34	37	31	68	107
The Planning Inspectorate					
Permanent	613	608	622	612	596
Non-Permanent	13	6	11	7	37

	1 April 1992	1 April 1993	1 April 1994	1 April 1995	1 April 1996
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution					
Permanent	285	347	398	403	343
Non-Permanent	20	19	30	25	32
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre					
Permanent	61	55	60	49	'43
Non-Permanent	6	6	10	11	12

The figures are taken from the Department of the Environment's Staff On-Line Information System (SOLIS), and show the actual numbers of staff-in-post employed as at 1 April 1992–1996.
[1] This is a correction to the figures previously supplied.

Health and Safety Executive

	1 April 1992	1 April 1993	1 April 1994	1 April 1995	1 April 1996
Permanent	4,218	4,441	4,418	4,233	4,006
Non permanent	104	97	127	158	145

The figures for the Health and Safety Executive were taken from their Personnel information database (PRIMA). These figures are for Full Time Equivalent Staff in Post.

Official Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each of the Ministers in his Department how many official ministerial visits they have undertaken since 1 January; and how many of these have been abroad. [9387]

Mr. Gummer: The information requested is as follows:

	Visits in the UK[1]	*Visits outside the UK*
John Gummer	42	17
David Curry	43	4
Robert B. Jones	44	5
The Earl Ferrers	30	4
Sir Paul Beresford	52	1
James Clappison	38	3

[1] A visit may incorporate travelling to more than one place.

Housing Association Starts

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the number of new housing association starts *(a)* in total and *(b)* in the eastern region next year. [9440]

Mr. Clappison: In the month to 13 December we received a total of 41 letters from Members of Parliament enclosing letters from housing associations about new housing association starts, including seven from associations in the eastern region.

Formaldehyde

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what regulations are currently in force in respect of the protection of human health and the environment from formaldehyde fumes. [9565]

Mr. Clappison: The following legislation relevant to the protection of human health and the environment from formaldehyde is in force:

the Environmental Protection Act 1990 with respect to emissions from those industrial processes with the greatest potential for pollution, the range of pollutants controlled includes formaldehyde where appropriate;

the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994; and

the Building Regulations 1991, part D (toxic substances), with respect to the use of urea formaldehyde foam insulation in cavity walls.

Housing (Single People)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many households living in accommodation matching the definition of the single room rent assessment figure for housing benefit purposes were identified in the census of 1991; [9418]

(2) how many single people *(a)* aged under 25 years *(b)* aged 25 to 59 years and *(c)* aged 60 and over were identified as living in accommodation matching the definition of the single room rent assessment figure for housing benefit purposes in the census of 1991. [9416]

Mr. Clappison: The information available from the census is for households occupying a bedsitting room. This is a wider category than that defined as a single room by the Department of the Environment and used by the Department of Social Security for housing benefit purposes, as it includes households who shared only one of the facilities of a toilet, kitchen or bathroom.

The relevant age breakdown in the census related to heads of households, and the "single, widowed, and divorced" category of heads of households and so included cohabiting couples and lone parents as well as people living by themselves, but excluded separated people living by themselves who were counted under the group "married heads of households".

There were 136,498 households identified as living in bedsits in Great Britain in the 1991 census, and of these 117,120 were people living by themselves.

The information by age available from the census was for the 121,355 single, widowed and divorced heads of household living in bedsits, as follows:

Age	*Number*
16–29	63,582
30–pensionable age	46,192
Pensionable age and over	11,581

Source:
1991 Census of population.

More up-to-date information on those living in rented accommodation in England is available from the annual survey of English housing.

Secondary Liquid Fuel

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the recommendations contained in the second report of the Environment Committee on the burning of secondary liquid fuel in cement kilns, HC497

of Session 1994–95 *(a)* have been implemented, *(b)* the Government have decided not to implement and *(c)* the Government are still considering. [8628]

Mr. Clappison: The Select Committee on the Environment is currently carrying out a further inquiry into the environmental impact of the cement manufacture. My Department's memorandum of evidence to the latest inquiry describes the extent to which the Committee's previous recommendations have been implemented. A copy of the memorandum has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the burning of secondary liquid fuels in kilns has been brought within the scope of the EU hazardous waste incineration directive; and if he will make a statement. [8629]

Mr. Clappison: The directive requires that the incineration of hazardous waste is subject to specified controls over pollution. Co-incineration plants, such as cement or lime kilns which burn hazardous waste, are within its scope.

Cammell Laird Shipbuilding Yard

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of fatal accidents at Cammell Laird shipbuilding yard in each year from 1966 until 1995. [9614]

Sir Paul Beresford: One fatal accident at the Cammell Laird shipbuilding yard has been reported to the Health and Safety Executive during the period 1986 to 1995.

Information Technology (Euro)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what tenders his Department has put out to convert its information technology systems to be euro compliant; what are the cost and person hours required to convert the systems to handle the euro; and when he expects his Department's systems to be fully economic and monetary union compliant. [9460]

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department and agencies will need to assess the impact which a single currency, assumed to be starting on 1 January 1999, would have on their information systems whether or not the United Kingdom decides to participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the specific spending pressures identified in the proposals of the local authority associations in the Consultative Council on Local Government Finance which have been recognised in his recent announcement on total spending for 1997–98. [9701]

Sir Paul Beresford: My right hon. Friend took into account all pressures on local government spending for 1997–98 as well as the scope for efficiencies. In forming his assessment of pressures, he had regard to the proposals which the local authority associations put to the Consultative Council on Local Government Finance. The provisional total standard spending announced by my right hon. Friend represents his view of the appropriate level of local authority spending in the round. It is not possible to identify how much has been included to meet individual burdens or pressures.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the provision for 1996–97 in respect of recycling supplementary credit approvals for local authorities; and what was the equivalent figure in the current year. [9787]

Sir Paul Beresford: Planned provision for the recycling supplementary credit approval programme in 1997–98 is nearly £2.2 million, which we propose to devote to the promotion of home composting. The provision for 1996–97 is currently £10 million.

The reduction in the resources available next year reflects the additional funding for recycling which is likely to be available from capital challenge allocations, landfill tax environment bodies, our initiatives on producer responsibility for packaging waste and newspapers, together with benefits arising from the private finance initiative.

Air Pollution Control

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sites in England and Wales are subject to local authority air pollution control under the Environmental Protection Act 1990; how many have been granted authorisation; of these how many *(a)* have been visited and *(b)* have submitted a detailed upgrading plan to the enforcing authority within the required period; and how many authorisations have been granted to industrial sites after the relevant upgrading deadline date has passed. [9832]

Mr. Clappison: I refer the hon. Lady to the report on the first five years' successful operation of the local air pollution control system, which was published on 9 December and a copy sent to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). The report contains a statistical overview of the operation of the system, including the latest available information on numbers of authorised processes, and the results of a survey on upgrading. Information on process visits is to be collected for 1996–97.

Drinking Water

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each occasion in the last five years when domestic drinking water was contaminated to an extent which was assessed by his Department as constituting a threat to public health; and if he will make a statement. [9775]

Mr. Clappison: There is a robust regulatory regime controlling drinking water quality administered by the drinking water inspectorate. Since 1990, there have been over 2,000 enforcement actions and some £2 billion of expenditure aimed at further improvements in drinking water quality. In 1995, the water companies in England and Wales carried out approximately 3.2 million tests on drinking water of which 99.5 per cent. showed that the relevant standards had been met.

Water companies in England and Wales are required to report all incidents in which drinking water quality might be affected. All incidents are investigated by the inspectorate. Most incidents are relatively minor happenings.

In those cases in which the drinking water was chemically contaminated and where the inspectorate has completed its investigations, there is no evidence that the magnitude or duration of the contamination was such as to endanger public health.

Most cases in which there is bacteriological contamination are trivial and often involve the notification of advice to boil water to a small number of consumers while tests are undertaken on the quality. In most cases, the advice is found to have been unnecessary, but consumers have been given protection rather than potentially left at risk.

The most significant risk to drinking water quality is the presence of cryptosporidium oocysts. On cryptosporidium, the notification to the inspectorate can relate to either the detection of cryptosporidium oocysts in treated water, or to an increase of the illness cryptosporidiosis in the community or both. The transmission of the illness occurs in a number of ways and often through contact with animals. One recent outbreak of cryptosporidiosis was found to be associated with a failure of a milk pasteurisation plant.

All incidents are investigated fully by the drinking water inspectorate. As cryptosporidiosis can be transmitted in many ways, the source of any outbreak has to be established through epidemiology. A case of South West Water Services Ltd. allegedly supplying water unfit for human consumption because of cryptosporidium is currently before the courts.

Notifications of events involving cryptosporidium are listed in the table under four headings. It should be noted that not all notifications become confirmed as incidents.

Cryptosporidium oocysts detected in treated water but no reported increase of cryptosporidiosis

Water company area	*Date*	*Location*
Yorkshire Water	19 December 1991	Redmires
Southern Water	19 March 1992	Broadfields Water Treatment Works (WTW)
Severn Trent Water	20 August 1992	Fairholmes WTW
Southern Water	8 September 1992	Steyning WTW
Southern Water	22 October 1992	Testwood WTW
South West Water	29 December 1992	Broomhill WTW
Yorkshire Water	5 January 1995	Huby WTW
Yorkshire Water	16 March 1995	Fixby WTW
Essex and Suffolk	30 March 1995	Ormsby WTW
Yorkshire Water	31 August 1995	Cottingham adit
Yorkshire Water	13 September 1995	Kepwick Springs WTW (in raw water)
South West Water	13 September 1995	Parracombe WTW
Yorkshire Water	5 January 1996	Elvington WTW
Yorkshire Water	10 January 1996	Elvington WTW
Yorkshire Water	15 January 1996	Kepwick Springs WTW
South West Water	29 May 1996	Littlehempston
Cambridge Water	30 May 1996	Duxford/Linton
South West Water	27 June 1996	Crown Hill WTW
Mid Kent Water / Southern Water	3 July 1996	Burham WTW

An increase in cryptosporidiosis in the community but oocysts not detected in treated water

Water company area	*Date*	*Location*
Southern Water	28 December 1990	Thanet area
North West Water	5 May 1992	West Cumbria
North West Water	27 March 1992	Barrow in Furness
North West Water	14 December 1992	Warrington
Northumbrian	15 June 1993	Sherburn
North West	April 1994	Chorley

Both oocysts detected in treated water and an increase of cryptosporidiosis in the community

Water company area	*Date*	*Location*
Yorkshire Water	13 November 1992	Bingley and Shipley
South West Water	12 August 1995	Torbay/Littlehempston

Incidents still under investigation

Water company area	*Date*	*Location*
Wessex Water	April 1993	Poole
Yorkshire Water	11 June 1993	Gilstead
North East	25 January 1996	Sunderland
Yorkshire Water	21 March 1996	Tophill
North West Water	29 April 1996	The Wirral
Yorkshire Water	17 October 1996	Elvington WTW

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what funds he plans to make available to authorities that have been or are to be reorganised on 1 April 1995, 1996, 1997 or 1998 for reorganisation costs incurred by them in 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [10336]

Mr. Curry: On 10 October, I invited authorities that have or are to be reorganised on or before 1 April 1998 to submit estimates of the amount of expenditure they expect to incur on transitional costs of reorganisation in 1997–98. On the basis, inter alia, of the information provided by the authorities, I have decided the maximum amounts to allocate towards such costs in 1997–98. I have given priority to authorities to be reorganised in 1997 and 1998. The majority of authorities to be reorganised in 1998 asked for allocations in respect of redundancy to be deferred until the mid-year review in October 1997. Accordingly, the allocations listed for authorities reorganising in 1998 are not intended to cover redundancy costs.

Maximum amounts: £000 rounded

Authority	*1997–98*
1996 reorganisations	
Hartlepool Borough Council	1,200
Redcar and Cleveland Council	900
Middlesbrough Borough Council	1,300
Stockton on Tees Borough Council	800
Bristol City Council	900
North Somerset Council	800
Bath and North East Somerset Council	900
South Gloucestershire Council	1,000
Kingston upon Hull Council	700
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	2,500

Maximum amounts: £000 rounded

Authority	*1997–98*
North Lincolnshire Council	700
North East Lincolnshire Council	700
York City Council	800
1997 reorganisations	
Bedfordshire County Council	700
Luton Borough Council	3,300
Milton Keynes Borough Council	2,200
Derbyshire County Council	900
Derby City Council	2,600
Dorset County Council	400
Bournemouth Borough Council	2,700
Poole Borough Council	2,600
Durham County Council	400
Darlington Borough Council	1,660
East Sussex County Council	1,700
Brighton and Hove Council	4,000
Hampshire County Council	1,400
Portsmouth City Council	2,600
Southampton City Council	2,700
Leicestershire County Council	800
Leicester City Council	3,100
Rutland District Council	1,260
Staffordshire County Council	500
Stoke-on-Trent City Council	2,400
Wiltshire County Council	80
Thamesdown Borough Council	800
1998 reorganisations	
Berkshire County Council	1,100
Bracknell Forest Borough Council	2,100
Newbury District Council	2,400
Reading Borough Council	2,700
Slough Borough Council	1,900
Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead	2,200
Wokingham District Council	2,900
Hereford and Worcester County Council	300
Hereford City Council	100
Leominster District Council	150
Malvern Hills District Council	200
South Herefordshire District Council	50
Devon County Council	1,000
Plymouth City Council	2,600
Torbay Borough Council	3,000
Essex County Council	500
Southend on Sea Borough Council	2,100
Thurrock Borough Council	2,400
Nottinghamshire County Council	400
Nottingham City Council	2,700
Cheshire County Council	500
Halton Borough Council	2,200
Warrington Borough Council	3,000
Shropshire County Council	300
The Wrekin District Council	2,400
Kent County Council	1,000
Gillingham Borough Council	200
Rochester City Council	400
Cambridgeshire County Council	400
Peterborough City Council	2,900
Lancashire County Council	800
Blackburn Borough Council	2,700
Blackpool Borough Council	2,700

The Isle of Wight and Buckinghamshire county council did not submit bids. Initial allocations will be made to the new shadow authorities of Herefordshire, Worcester, East Malvern and Tenbury, and Rochester and Gillingham shortly after they are established in May 1997.

Housing Allocations

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to make regulations exempting further classes of people from the allocation provisions in part VI of the Housing Act 1996; and if he will make a statement. [10337]

Mr. Curry: The Government are committed to ensuring that the new allocations provisions in part VI of the 1996 Act do not compromise the present arrangements under which many local authorities accept a limited number of referrals from welfare agencies and hostels for homeless people. I have reflected carefully on whether it is necessary to make regulations in order to allow such arrangements to continue, and have concluded that it is not. There is sufficient flexibility inherent in part VI to allow local authorities to maintain such arrangements within the new allocation schemes they will be establishing, and I am issuing guidance to this effect.

Packaging Waste Regulations

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has considered the responses to the consultation paper he issued in July on the Producer Responsibility (Packaging Waste) Regulations; and if he will make a statement. [10475]

Mr. Gummer: Together with my colleagues, the President of the Board of Trade and the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales, I published proposals in July which aim to secure an effective business-led approach to meeting the environmental goal of a more sustainable approach to packaging waste. This followed a lengthy process of consultation with a wide range of business sectors and is based on the industry agreement on the shared approach achieved on 15 December 1995.

The system we propose is based on four guiding principles:

- using the market to reflect the cost of dealing with waste in the price the consumer pays;
- a shared approach involving all parts of the packaging chain;
- the lightest regulatory approach giving the maximum scope for obligated businesses to self-certify and self-assess their obligations and to perform those obligations through business-run schemes, or individually subject to monitoring by the environment agencies.
- continuing industry involvement in monitoring, reviewing and proposing changes to the system through the Advisory Committee on Packaging.

We have had a wide range of responses to the consultation paper including 100 from trade associations representing 53,000 member businesses and a further 348 from individual businesses and other interested organisations. Most respondents endorsed the overall framework and the basic provisions which flow from the 15 December agreement. However, the responses did raise specific concerns on issues such as the timetable, the level of interim targets, the cut-off threshold for small businesses, the wholesaler obligation and the scope and nature of exemptions. I have considered these and have sought the views of Sir Peter Parker and the Advisory Committee on Packaging and I am grateful to have their further comments which will be published separately.

I therefore intend to make the following modifications to the draft regulations which will be subject to parliamentary debate.

To allow businesses sufficient time to assess the implications of the regulations for them and the merits of joining a collective business scheme such as VALPAK, I propose to delay the first requirement for registration and provision of data until the summer of 1997 and I will make a further announcement shortly. The date for the renewal of registration and the provision of data will, from 1998 onwards, be 1 April.

A further concern raised related to the proposed interim targets for recovery and recycling which could place an unnecessarily high burden on some businesses and particularly on those who handle materials which are harder to recover. Many felt that a slower build-up to the full directive targets in 2001 targets would be more realistic. I therefore propose to revise the interim targets on individual businesses as follows:

	Minimum recycling target for each material	*Overall recovery target*	*Recovery of UK packaging waste*
1998–99	7	38	32
2000	11	43	40
2001	16	[1]52	50

[1] Of which a minimum of 26 per cent. must be recycling.

These targets will enable the UK to meet the recycling and recovery targets set out in the EC directive on packaging and packaging waste, 94/62 EC.

I have also taken account of the representations that some sectors of industry will have greater difficulty in adapting to the proposed obligations than others, particularly in the case of small firms. I also consider that the most effective means of introducing the new system will be to take a staged approach starting with the largest businesses. I therefore propose to adopt a phased approach in relation to the following aspects:

> No business with a turnover of less than £5 million, or that handled less than 50 tonnes of packaging will have an obligation in the years 1997 to 1999, but from 1 January 2000 an eligible business with a turnover of £1 million or more and that handled more than 50 tonnes of packaging will be obligated. The proposed wholesaler obligation will apply from 1 January 2000.

I am confident that a phased approach will allow these sectors additional time to prepare and work up methods for meeting recycling and recovery objectives in a form which meets their needs.

I have considered also issues raised by those who handle packaging which is or is associated with special or hazardous waste. Where packaging is likely to become special waste, producers will not need to include it when calculating their recovery and recycling obligations, but they will need to provide data and indicate the steps taken to promote or increase its recovery. This amendment should assist those producers that handle packaging whose hazardous or contaminated nature require special disposal arrangements.

I also propose to place an obligation on production of reusable packaging but to exempt it when it is reused. Other more detailed changes will be set out in the published regulations.

I also recognise that for many businesses a major concern is not the recycling and recovery effort itself but the means of gathering data. Some businesses already have good data systems while many trade associations and the Industry Council on Packaging and the Environment are already working to develop sector guides and assistance with definitions and other guidance. I intend to support this work and to make available, to help to start the system, a very simple ready reckoner which businesses can use to meet the initial requirement for a best estimate expressed in tonnes per annum.

The environment agencies that will monitor and enforce the regulations will charge a fee to individual businesses and collective schemes to cover the costs of their functions. In the light of consultation, and taking account of the changes listed I propose to set the fee for individual businesses at £750 per annum and to offer schemes a rebate of up to 87 per cent. of this according to the size of their membership.

The advisory committee is continuing its work on implementation of the system and is currently considering matters relating to evidence of compliance and recent representations it has received on the issue of equitable participation in household waste recovery. It is also preparing for its review of the system as a whole. On these and other issues, it will publish its findings as appropriate and I am fully committed to supporting its continuing role.

Ministerial Leave

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many days of leave he plans to take during the Christmas adjournment; [9829]

(2) how many days leave he has taken in the Easter, Whitsun and summer adjournments; and how many days leave he took during the time in which Parliament was prorogued this year. [9828]

Mr. Gummer: As a Minister I am available 365 days of the year. If the hon. Member has issues that he needs to raise with me over the Christmas break or during the coming Easter or summer recesses, he is welcome to contact me at home or my office.

Hemp

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies the Government have *(a)* undertaken and *(b)* commissioned on the use of hemp as an alternative source for paper manufacture; and what European Union (i) studies and (ii) support schemes have been established in respect of the use of hemp for paper making. [3925]

Mr. Boswell: I have been asked to reply.

Hemp grown under licence in this country may be used for paper making. The Department is funding research into the structure of hemp fibres and the industrial potential of hemp, which will be relevant to its use in paper making.

In 1994 a European Union funded study looked at the increased application of domestically produced plant fibres. The agri-industrial research programme also funded a three-year study of the processing of short fibres. Both of these studies examined the use of hemp for paper making.

A number of schemes exist under which support would be obtained to assist development of hemp for paper making and these include:

1. the Agriculture and Fisheries (FAIR) Programme, which supports research of development projects;
2. The EU's Fourth Framework Programme;
3. projects in Objective 5b areas may be eligible under the Challenge for Agriculture Scheme.

In addition, the common agriculture policy hemp regime provides for area payments to hemp growers.

Asbestos

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to increase the monitoring of asbestos imports. [7899]

Mr. Oppenheim: I have been asked to reply.

HM Customs and Excise is responsible for enforcing the statutory controls on imports of asbestos from third countries—the controls do not apply to intra-Community movements.

Customs is not aware of any current circumstances which warrant an increase in the monitoring of asbestos imports. Any information indicating that there may be an enhanced risk of unauthorised imports of asbestos should be passed to customs.

PRIME MINISTER

Staff

Mr. Hain: To ask the Prime Minister how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* non-permanent staff there have been in (i) his Department and (ii) executive agencies of his Department in each year since 1992. [9620]

The Prime Minister: For these purposes, my office forms part of the Cabinet Office, Office of Public Service. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the then Paymaster General on 10 December, *Official Report*, columns *83–84*.

Dublin Summit

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the *(a)* topics and *(b)* documents considered at the Heads of Government meeting at Dublin on 13 and 14 December on which he placed a United Kingdom scrutiny reserve. [9731]

The Prime Minister: The contents of the Economic and Finance Council report to the Dublin European Council on preparations for stage 3 of economic and monetary union are subject to a United Kingdom parliamentary scrutiny reserve. This point is reflected in the ECOFIN report itself and in the presidency conclusions of the European Council.

Ministers (Severance Pay)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy that the severance payment received by a Minister on resignation shall not be paid when that resignation followed criticism of the conduct of the Minister by a Select Committee of the House. [9712]

The Prime Minister: The terms under which a Minister is entitled to a severance payment are laid down in the Ministerial and Other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991, which was approved by Parliament without any Divisions.

Ministerial Leave

Mr. Ian McCartney: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many days of leave he plans to take during the Christmas adjournment; [9823]

(2) how many days leave he has taken in the Easter, Whitsun and summer adjournments; and how many days leave he took during the time in which Parliament was prorogued this year. [9822]

The Prime Minister: Ministers are required to be available for Government business at all times. Subject to this overall requirement they may take leave as and when Government business permits.

I have decided, after careful consideration, in the knowledge that UHF television coverage now extends to 99.4 per cent. of the population, and in the light of plans for the introduction of digital terrestrial television that the formal programme of building 25 relay stations a year should cease. The self-help television scheme, established by the Government in 1980 to assist those communities not eligible for assistance under the relay programme, will remain. The BBC and ITC will continue to give free technical advice to those seeking to establish such schemes in the future. In addition, the BBC and Independent Television Commission will continue to promote improvements in the quality and range of television transmission. They will provide free technical advice to the public on television reception and will in exceptional circumstances consider constructing new television relays to extend terrestrial services.

EU Culture Council

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what was the outcome of the Culture Council on 16 December. [10426]

Mr. Sproat: EU Ministers of culture met on 16 December 1996 in Brussels. Ministers agreed a resolution on the integration of cultural aspects into other Community actions. The purpose of this resolution is to give effect to article 128(4) of the treaty on European Union.

Ministers held an exchange of views on the proposal for a directive amending the television without frontiers directive and on the proposal to establish a European guarantee fund to promote cinema and television production. The Council held an exchange of views on the development of new audiovisual services and adopted conclusions welcoming the European Commission's Green Paper on the protection of minors and human dignity in the audiovisual and information services. Ministers held an exchange of views on the issue of violence in the media.

Ministers noted that the conciliation process with the European Parliament on the Ariane and Raphael programmes would now be convened under the Dutch presidency. An exchange of views was held on a number of further issues, including music, book pricing and the European cities of culture. Plovdiv was selected to host the Cultural Month 1999. Ministers also touched on the issues of cultural funding, authors' rights and cross-media ownership.

Television Licence Fee

Mr. Dover: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will make a statement about the level of the television licence fee. [10478]

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government have decided that changes in the licence fee for the five years commencing 1 April 1997 should be:

Year one (1997–98): RPI

Year two (1998–99): RPI plus 3 per cent.

Year three (1999–2000): RPI plus 0.5 per cent.

Year four (2000–01): RPI minus 1 per cent.

Year five (2001–02): RPI minus 2.5 per cent.

This equates to a change in the level of the licence fee over the five-year period of retail prices index minus 0.08 per cent. The non-uniform pattern of annual changes reflects the need for expenditure on new digital services in the earlier years. This will be offset in 1997–98 by receipts from the sale of the BBC's transmission system, and in later years by increased efficiency savings and commercial income.

The annual licence fee increase takes effect from each April. It is calculated on the basis of the annual increase in RPI in the 12 months to the preceding September. The RPI figure for September 1996 was 2.1 per cent., and this implies new fees from 1 April 1997 of £91.50 for a colour licence and £30.50 for a black and white licence. The necessary regulations will be laid before the House as part of new consolidated television licence fee regulations.

Changes in the level of the television licence fee have been linked to movements in RPI since April 1988. Changes have been set at RPI for each year since then, except in 1991 when the settlement was held at RPI minus 3 per cent.

On 12 August this year, I announced the appointment of independent consultants, Braxton Associates, to undertake a further review of the BBC's progress in achieving greater efficiency, reducing television licence fee evasion and exploiting additional sources of revenue, and to advise me on the level of the TV licence fee for the five years commencing 1 April 1997.

Braxton Associates reported to me on 16 October, and a management summary of the report is being published tomorrow. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

The consultants concluded that, while the BBC had made significant strides in improving efficiency in the last few years, there was nevertheless scope for further efficiency savings in the next five years. Their analysis of various assumptions about future developments suggested a range for the cumulative five-year settlement from RPI minus 1.9 per cent. to RPI plus 1.4 per cent. All their illustrative models showed a profile of real increases in years two and three, and real decreases in years four and five. This profile is reflected in the Government's decision.

The BBC will now be able to pursue its plans for digital broadcasting and enhance its programme services. Television licence fee payers will be able to benefit from the BBC's planned services, but their licence fee increases over the next five years as a whole will be held just below inflation.

Area Museums Councils

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when she plans to announce the membership of the group which will consider the area museums councils. [5668]

Mr. Sproat: A working party has been appointed to review the AMCs and will include the following members:

Mr. David Beeton (Chief Executive, Historic Royal Palaces Agency);

Sir Neil Cossons OBE, (Director, Science Museum);

Dr. David Flemming (Director, Tyne and Wear Museum Service);

Mr. Timothy Mason (Director, Museums and Galleries Commission);

Miss Barbara Woroncow (Director, Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council, and President of the Museums Association);

Mr. Christopher Zeuner (Director of the Weald and Downland Museum, and a member of the Association of Independent Museums);

I have asked for the consultation report by Monday 7 April 1997. Arrangements for the chairman/secretary will be announced in the new year.

This review will involve wide consultations, both with the AMCs themselves and with the broad range of bodies which use the AMCs' services.

National Reading Initiative

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if she will list the membership of the committee which will advise the Government on the national reading initiative under the chairmanship of Mrs. Ian Curteis. [3998]

Mr. Sproat: The membership of the panel for the national reading initiative under the chairmanship of Mrs. Ian Curteis (Joanna Trollope) is:

Professor Ray Cowell—East Midlands Art Board

Catherine Blanshard—Children's librarian, Hertfordshire CC

Floella Benjamin—Children's broadcaster

Timothy West—Actor

Frances Booker—Primary school teacher, SCAA

Vaughan Rees—ex DNH administrator

Alan Judd—ex FCO administrator, and author

Sue Blanshard—Folio Society

The panel will take evidence widely, and produce its conclusions in spring next year.

The panel wishes to encourage any individual or body that wishes to give evidence to be in touch with Mrs. Ian Curteis through DNH.

Departmental Buildings (Electricity)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what capacity of electricity used in her Department's buildings is generated in a combined heat and power plant; and what plans she has to increase that capacity. [9966]

Mr. Sproat: So far as my Department and its agencies are concerned there is no electricity generated in a combined heat and power plant CAP. However, one of the royal palaces—the Banqueting house—is connected to the Whitehall district heating scheme which will connect to a new CAP from next autumn, the overall capacity being 4,500 KW.

In respect of other buildings, opportunities for CAP are limited but would be considered as part of the evaluation process for energy efficiency, particularly when replacing plant.

Museums and Galleries

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment she has made of the current proportion of visitors to the museums and galleries supported by her Department who come from overseas. [8927]

Mr. Sproat: On the basis of recent surveys carried out by the museums and galleries sponsored by my Department, I estimate that one third of visits are made by overseas visitors.

National Lottery

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what consultation was carried out *(a)* with individual football clubs and organisations representing football clubs and *(b)* with other bodies before the decision was taken to give approval to a second weekly national lottery. [10150]

Mr. Sproat: None.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to monitor the impact of the introduction of the mid-week national lottery draw on the future income *(a)* generated by football clubs' own lotteries and *(b)* raised by the Football Trust from pool betting duty and spot the ball competitions. [10149]

Mr. Sproat: I shall be meeting the Football Trust to discuss its funding position and related matters further, in the light of its survey of essential remaining safety work at league football clubs, when this is complete.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to introduce new outlets for the lottery, with the introduction of a mid-week lottery; and if she will make a statement. [9789]

Mr. Sproat: This is an operational matter for Camelot Group plc. I have therefore asked the Director General of the National Lottery, who is responsible for regulating the operation of the lottery, to write to the hon. Member and to place copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

Information Technology (Euro)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what tenders her Department has put out to convert its information technology systems to be euro compliant; what are the cost and person hours required to convert the systems to handle the euro; and when she expects her department's systems to be fully economic and monetary union compliant. [9452]

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage and its agencies will need to assess the impact that a single currency, assumed to be starting on 1 January 1999, would have on their information systems, whether or not the United Kingdom decides to participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union.

introduction of the integrated administration and control system. The environmental dimension of support for agriculture in Wales has been expanded with the introduction of five environmentally sensitive areas and an agri-environment programme specific to Welsh needs has been steered through the process approved by the EU. Advice has been provided through the countryside advice information service and ADAS to help farmers take advantage of the support available to them and to encourage a cost-effective and efficient farming economy in Wales, while the new food strategy addresses the opportunities that exist for the marketing and development of Welsh food products. Between the beginning of 1992–93 and the end of 1996–97 the Department expects to have paid out over £1 billion in support to the agricultural and fishing industries in Wales.

The Department completed the A55 dualling between Chester and Bangor in north Wales in October 1994. The total cost of this project, including the tunnels, was £700 million. In south Wales, completion of the M4 in December 1994 finalised a continuous motorway between London and west Wales, at a cost since 1979 of £230 million in Wales. The second Severn crossing, opened to traffic in June of this year, has more than doubled road capacity across the estuary.

In April 1992, the Planning Inspectorate was established as an agency of the Welsh Office and the Department of the Environment. In 1996, the Department issued "Planning Guidance (Wales): Planning Policy" and "Planning Guidance (Wales: Unitary Development Plans". The former presents, for the first time, integrated planning policy guidance for Wales; the latter provides guidance to local planning authorities on the preparation of their unitary development plans.

The Welsh Office has continued working to protect the Welsh environment and promoting sustainable development. Important wildlife and habitats throughout Wales are being conserved through environmental designations—for example, 35 candidate special areas of conservation have been submitted to the EC and 910 locations in Wales have been designated as sites of special scientific interest. The Department has established three national parks in Wales as free-standing special purpose authorities; has instigated the Tir Cymen countryside stewardship scheme; has established an air quality forum and Wales biodiversity group; and, following the major oil spillage earlier this year, has established and funded the Sea Empress environmental evaluation committee.

Over £2 billion has been committed for the economic, social and environmental development of Wales.

The Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales, the Cardiff Bay development corporation, the Wales tourist board and the Land Authority for Wales have pursued gross programmes totalling £1.29 billion over this period. Projects valued at £295.7 million have been financed under my Department's strategic development scheme with a further £24.5 million approved under the urban investment grant. European programmes for industrial south and rural Wales, and various Community initiatives, have been negotiated, providing £359 million funding across the Principality. A new £178 million three-year programme for industrial south Wales will shortly be started.

This funding has helped support the objectives of the five-year programme for the valleys launched in 1993, promising £1 billion of public sector investment, and of the rural White Paper published in March 1996.

There have been 725 inward investment projects with a capital investment of £5.7 billion, promising 37,600 new jobs and 24,362 safeguarded jobs.

From January 1997, the newly formed Welsh European programme executive will take over most of the Department's responsibilities for structural funds management, and the Welsh Office will succeed the Department for Education and Employment in managing the European social fund in Wales. From April 1997, SDS funding totalling £38 million per annum after three years will be progressively delegated to local authorities and a new £20 million Welsh capital challenge will take effect.

Since December 1992, peak seasonally adjusted unemployment in Wales has fallen by 38,900 or 29 per cent. to 94,800—a work force rate of 7.5 per cent. This is the lowest unemployment rate in Wales since January 1991.

Manufacturing output in Wales in the quarters to Q2, 1996 was 18.1 per cent. higher than in the four quarters to Q1, 1992, compared with a rise of 8.3 per cent. for the UK as a whole.

Over the period 1994–95 to 1996–97, the Welsh Office has contracted with the Welsh training and enterprise councils for 8,200 young people to start modern apprenticeships.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

South Africa

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total amount of aid to South Africa in each of the years 1991 to 1995 from *(a)* the European Community and *(b)* the United Kingdom, bilaterally. [9323]

Dr. Liam Fox: The information is as follows:

Net Bilateral Aid (ODA) to South Africa (£ millions)

	European	*United Kingdom*
1991	—	[1]9.33
1992	—	[1]11.56
1993	55.01	12.92
1994	45.34	15.61
1995	37.38	15.16

[1] The UK figures for 1991 and 1992 are those for the nearest corresponding financial year. EC aid to South Africa did not commence until 1993. Before the 1994 elections, all aid was channelled through non-governmental organisations, community groups or other institutions.

UN Aid Target

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of the timetable for achieving the UN target of 0.7 per cent. of gross national product of the Overseas Development Administration budget; and what progress has been made to date in achieving the target. [10146]

Dr. Liam Fox: The Government remain committed to meeting the UN target of 0.7 per cent. of gross national product to be devoted to development assistance, but not to a timetable for reaching it. At 0.28 per cent. of GNP, the UK ratio remains above average for all donors—0.27 per cent. UK public and private flows to the developing world stood at 1.38 per cent. of GNP in 1995, well in excess of the 1 per cent. UN target, and second only to the Netherlands.

Regional Summit, Nairobi

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the regional summit in Nairobi on 16 December. [9757]

Dr. Liam Fox: We welcome the decision of the Nairobi summit on 16 and 17 December that Presidents Moi, Mugabe, Mandela and Biya should take steps to assist the ending of conflict in easter Zaire, and to promote peace and security in the great lakes region.

DEFENCE

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what additional resources have been made available to the Atomic Weapons Establishment in respect of the promotion and operation of a comprehensive test ban treaty. [9635]

Mr. Arbuthnot: As there are currently no plans to involve AWE in the promotion and operation of CTBT, no additional resources have been allocated. The United Kingdom remains committed to an effective and verifiable comprehensive test ban treaty. My Department has made available additional funding for the United Kingdom's share of the international monitoring system, which is to be established by the CTBT organisation.

Information Technology (Euro)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what tenders his Department has put out to convert its information technology systems to be euro compliant; what are the cost and person hours required to convert the systems to handle the euro; and when he expects his Department's systems to be fully economic and monetary union compliant. [9462]

Mr. Arbuthnot: My Department and agencies will need to assess the impact that a single currency, assumed to be starting on 1 January 1999, would have on their information systems, whether or not the United Kingdom decides to participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union.

Young Service Personnel (Fatalities)

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of those under age 18 years in the United Kingdom armed forces have been killed in each of the last three years. [9298]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Fred Johnson to Mr. Alan Simpson, dated 18 December 1996:

In the absence of the Chief Executive on duty, I have been asked to reply to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence regarding the number of minors in the United Kingdom armed forces killed in each of the last three years, as this matter falls within the area of responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency.

The figures are as follows:

1993: 1

1994: 0

1995: 3

1996 to date[1]: 1

[1] Information reported to DASA as at 12 December 1996.

Notes:

'Minors' comprise those aged 16 and 17.

'Killed' has been taken to include all deaths of serving personnel either on duty or off duty.

Extraterrestrial Phenomena

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to allocate resources to researching extraterrestrial phenomena. [9419]

Mr. Soames: I have nothing to add to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 17 October 1996, *Official Report*, column *1082*.

Staff

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* non-permanent staff there have been in (i) his Department and (ii) executive agencies of his Department in each year since 1992. [9623]

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 25 November 1996, *Official Report*, columns *27–28*.

Chilwell/Chetwynd Barracks

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which establishments his Department plans to be covered by the area policing team based at Chilwell/Chetwynd barracks; [9692]

(2) what are the proposed authorised complements for his Department's area policing teams at *(a)* Dishforth, *(b)* Donnington and *(c)* Chilwell; [9696]

(3) when the area policing team complements at *(a)* Dishforth, *(b)* Donnington and *(c)* Chilwell will be introduced; [9697]

(4) what assessment he has made of the benefits of retaining an on-site Ministry of Defence Police presence at base ordnance depot Donnington and Chilwell/Chetwynd barracks until the area policing teams are fully established. [9698]

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Ministry of Defence Police. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from W. E. E. Boreham to Mr. Paddy Tipping, dated 18 December 1996:

I am replying to your Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about the Area Policing Teams of the Ministry of Defence as these matters fall within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive/Chief Constable of the Ministry of Defence Police.

You asked when the APT complements for Dishforth, Donnington and Chilwell will be introduced. It is planned to introduce Area Policing Teams at Donnington and Chilwell in April 1997, and at Dishforth on a date in 1997 yet to be determined.

You asked what assessment had been made of the benefits of retaining an on-site presence at BOD Donnington and Chetwynd Barracks until APTs are fully established. The requirement for Ministry of Defence Police is made by discussion between the Establishment, the budget holder and the Chief Constable, taking into account the views of specialist complementing teams. This procedure has been undertaken for BOD Donnington and Childwell/Chetwynd Barracks, amongst others, and considered the best and most economical means of meeting those requirements without lowering in any way the necessary security standards.

You asked which establishments are to be covered by the APT to be based at Chilwell/Chetwynd Barracks. The Area Policing Team based there will cover those Ministry of Defence establishments within reasonable range of their base, and give assistance according to the assessed priorities on the calls on their time.

You wished to know the authorised complements for the APTs proposed for Dishforth, Donnington and Chilwell. The APT complements at Donnington and Chilwell will each be 11 officers; and in addition 8 MDP officers will be retained at Donnington for policing duties. No decisions have yet been taken on Dishforth.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) from which budget holders the funding for *(a)* the Ministry of Defence Police area policing teams at Chilwell/Chetwynd barracks and *(b)* the Military Provost guard service at Chilwell/Chetwynd barracks will be provided in 1997–98; [9691]

(2) what consent has been (i) sought and (ii) received from the chief constable of Nottinghamshire constabulary in respect of *(a)* armed and *(b)* unarmed off-base patrols by the Military Provost guard service at Chilwell/Chetwynd barracks; [9694]

(3) what anti-terrorist patrols will be included in the off-base activities of the Military Provost guard service at Chilwell/Chetwynd barracks. [9695]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of state for Defence what has been the total cost in each of the last five years of acquiring and operating nuclear weapons and their delivery systems. [9670]

Mr. Arbuthnot: The strategic nuclear deterrent is the UK's only dedicated nuclear weapon delivery system. I refer the hon. Member to the Trident procurement and Polaris and Trident operating costs for 1991–92 and 1992–93 given in answer to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on 27 October 1993, *Official Report,* column *702*, for 1994–95 given in answer to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on 6 March 1996, *Official Report,* column *232*, and for 1995–96 given in answer to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 26 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *193*. The figure for 1993–94 is £1,082 million. The operating costs of the WE177 free-fall nuclear bomb and the Lance nuclear artillery system, which was withdrawn from service in 1992–93, are not recorded separately.

Great Lakes Region

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral statement of 14 November, *Official report,* columns 487–89, what contribution United Kingdom forces have made to the resolution of the humanitarian crisis in the great lakes region; and if he will make a statement. [10399]

Mr. Soames: British forces deployed to the region have made an extremely valuable contribution to the action taken by the international community. The Canberra PR9 has flown 24 sorties, playing a pivotal role in determining the precise location and numbers of refugee groups in eastern Zaire. Our liaison personnel in Rwanda have provided unique information about the situation on the ground, and have assisted in the co-ordination of work in the area.

Substantial numbers of refugees have returned home to Rwanda, and aid agencies now enjoy greater ease of access to eastern Zaire. In the light of the dramatic change in the humanitarian situation, the steering group overseeing the multinational mission to the region has recommended to the UN Secretary-General that the multinational force be withdrawn by 31 December. The focus now must be on efforts to obtain wider access for the aid agencies on the ground and to enable them to assess the scale and nature of humanitarian needs and how these can best be met.

Our forces in the region will accordingly return to the UK this week. Our international partners are making similar plans for the withdrawal of their own forces.

The UK will continue to lend full support to the humanitarian mission in the region and to regional efforts to find a lasting political solution. In that context we welcome the outcome of the Nairobi summit of 16 and 17 December.

Convicted Soldiers (Cyprus)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what Army pension payments will be made to each of the three soldiers convicted of the manslaughter of the Danish tour guide in Cyprus; when such payments will commence; and what is the current value of such pensions. [8639]

Mr. Soames: I can confirm that the three former soldiers had accrued sufficient military service to qualify for a preserved Army pension, which will be payable from their 60th birthday. Under the code of access to Government information, it is not our policy to release information relating to an individual's financial affairs on the grounds that to do so without that person's consent could facilitate an unwarranted invasion of privacy.

Unidentified Craft

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of state for Defence if his Department will adopt a policy on the reporting of unidentified craft of releasing to the press details of (i) shape, flight pattern, colour and size of craft, (ii) where and when the craft was seen, (iii) what action his Department took and (iv) the radar profile of the craft. [9410]

Mr. Soames: No.

Mr. Jones: To ask the secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the incident on 16 October 1990 involving two unidentified craft in the vicinity of Wylfa nuclear power station on Anglesey; what estimate the intercepting helicopter pilots made of the departing speeds of the two unidentified craft; if they showed up on radar; and if he will make a statement. [9561]

Mr. Soames: None, so far as we can establish from existing records.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the two attempted interceptions of unidentified craft that occurred near Anglesey in September and November 1995; what other attempts have been made to intercept unidentified craft in this vicinity; and if he will make a statement [9562]

Mr. Soames: From records available, and from the limited information given in the question, we are unable to identify any incidents of this kind.

Pindar Bunker

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many beds there are in the Pindar bunker; how many of these will be occupied over Christmas; and what is his Department's estimate of the cost of using the unoccupied beds to shelter the homeless; [9669]

(2) what estimate he has made of the operating costs of the Pindar bunker in 1996–97. [9668]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Training Facilities (Bahrain)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training facilities are provided for Bahrain defence force personnel in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [9737]

Mr. Soames: The Bahrain defence force is provided with access to a range of military training courses in the UK. Details of military assistance remain confidential between Governments.

Military Provost Guard Service

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what circumstances his Department will arm patrols by the Military Provost guard service outside an establishment. [9693]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Area Policing Teams

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the introduction of area policing teams at Chilwell and Donnington in the event of the annulment of the Army Terms of Service (Amendment) Regulations (S.I., No. 2973/96). [9699]

Mr. Soames: I hope that these will not be annulled. In the event that they were, the implications would be carefully considered at the time.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was the cost of the anti-botulism toxin vaccine serum produced from October 1990 for use in the Gulf war, mentioned in the memorandum prepared by his Department issued in support of the ministerial statement on Gulf war illness on 10 December, *Official Report*, columns 119–23; [9632]

(2) what quality control was applied to the purchase of propoxur and bendiocarb-based pesticides from suppliers in Riyadh in January 1991; [9595]

(3) what was the cost of the anthrax vaccine ordered from the public health laboratory service in August 1990, to which reference is made in his Department's memorandum released in support of the statement made on Gulf war illness on 10 December, *Official Report*, columns 119–23. [9637]

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the oral statement by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces of 10 December *Official Report*, column 120, on Gulf war syndrome, what steps he has taken to assist Professor Nicola Cherry and Dr. Patricia Doyle to visit Iraq in order to meet Dr. Mubarrak, Minister of Health. [9429]

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will include in the investigation being conducted by his Department's permanent under-secretary into the misleading of the House on the issue of organophosphate pesticide use the conclusions of the inquiry conducted by his Department's security official Mr. A. G. Rucker into the alleged theft of Gulf war syndrome documents, as reported to him by the hon. Member for South Shields in November 1995; [9727]

(2) how many of the Gulf war veterans examined by the medical assessment programme have been found to be suffering from (i) kidney and liver damage, (ii) lung complications, (iii) osteoporosis, and (iv) neurological damage; [9723]

(3) pursuant to his oral statement of 10 December, *Official Report*, column 121, on how many occasions information was provided in background material to parliamentary answers on the possible local purchase of organophosphate pesticides between October 1995 and September 1996; [9725]

(4) how many medical records of those in his Department serving in the Gulf war are currently missing; and if he will make a statement on the steps being taken to recover them; [9722]

(5) if he will name the staff undertaking clinical work for his Department as part of the medical assessment programme. [9724]

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Members and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the terms of reference of the investigation being conducted by his Department's permanent under-secretary into the misleading of the House on the issue of organophosphate pesticide use during the Gulf war; and who will assist the permanent under-secretary in his investigation. [9719]

Mr. Soames: The terms of reference of the investigation being conducted by my Department are to establish why proper and timely advice on the subject of organophosphate pesticide use during the Gulf war was not provided to MOD Ministers between July 1994 and September 1996. The permanent under-secretary will be assisted principally by members of the organophosphate pesticide investigation team.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of the minutes of the inquiry which is being set in hand by his Department into the misleading of the House on the issue of organophosphate pesticide use during the Gulf war. [9721]

Mr. Soames: The investigation within my Department into the failures in providing proper and timely advice to Ministers about organophosphate pesticide use during the Gulf war is expected to be completed by February 1997. The findings of the investigation will be made available to the House at the earliest opportunity.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many parliamentary questions his Department answered between October 1995 and September 1996 on the use of organophosphate pesticides during the Gulf war. [9726]

Mr. Soames: Between October 1995 and September 1996 one parliamentary question was answered by my Department on the use of organophosphate pesticides during the Gulf war. This question was answered on 30 October 1995.

Dr. Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the investigation being conducted by his Department into the misleading of the House on the issue of organophosphate pesticide use during the Gulf war has commenced; and when he expects to report its findings to the House. [9720]

Mr. Soames: The investigation within my Department into the failures in providing proper and timely advice to Ministers about organophosphate pesticide use during the Gulf war commenced on 16 December 1996. I expect to be able to report the findings of the investigation to the House by February 1997.

Tornado

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what specific reliability and ergonomic factors have led to the requirement for improved Tornado nose landing gear cable harness assembly as advertised as future purchase number SMC 11aR/273 in MOD "Contracts Bulletin" Vol. 11, No. 7; and if continued use of existing assemblies is affecting serviceability of the Tornado fleet. [9592]

Mr. Soames: The Tornado nose landing gear cable harness assembly dates back to the original aircraft design. The assembly has been found to be susceptible to water and grit ingress which can give rise to false readings on the cockpit instruments and system unserviceability. There is no significant impact on aircraft availability and no adverse effect on airworthiness.

TREASURY

European Union (Currency Support)

Mr. Spearing: *To ask the* Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has received for a regulation of the European Community in pursuit of budgetary discipline and monetary stability to secure the obligations of members or institutions to support the currency of any one of its members, being a member of the exchange rate mechanism but not that of a common currency; and under what article of the treaty of European Union such regulation could be proposed. [7693]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* The Florence European Council agreed that a new exchange rate mechanism will be established for stage 3 of economic and monetary union to link the euro with currencies of member states remaining outside the single currency. The new mechanism, like the existing one, will be an intergovernmental nature and outside the community, and EC treaty, framework. Membership will be voluntary.

Proposals for how the mechanism may operate were set out by the European Monetary Institute in its paper of 7 October entitled "Monetary and Exchange Rate Policy Co-operation between the euro area and other EU countries", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. There are no draft legal texts at this stage.

Administration Costs

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the total administration costs of non-departmental public bodies in each year between 1991–92 and 1996–97. [8276]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 9 December 1996]:* As part of the work for developing the expenditure plans published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", the Government collected information on the total administration costs of the larger executive non-departmental public bodies—those which *(a)* have 25 or more staff; and which *(b)* normally rely upon Government grant or grant in aid for 50 per cent. or more of their income or trade mainly with Government Departments. While the information was not complete, expenditure was estimated to have been about £1.9 billion in 1993–94 , £2 billion in 1994–95 and £2.1 billion in 1995–96 and is expected to be £2.1 billion in 1996–97.

Information relating to 1991–92 and 1992–93 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Departments will be publishing information on the administration costs of each of their larger executive non-departmental public bodies and tribunals from 1993–94 to 1999–2000 in their annual reports in March 1997.

Pensions (Public Sector Research Establishments)

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what decisions have been taken to finance the costs arising from the crystallisation of pensions liabilities of public sector research establishments; if he will list the establishments involved; and which Departments will bear the costs involved. [8888]

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* Pension liabilities of public sector research establishments crystallise *(a)* when a pension entitlement becomes payable and *(b)* on the transfer of accrued rights out of unfunded schemes into funded schemes. The existing arrangements for financing these costs vary between Departments and between establishments—no decisions have been taken to change the current arrangements.

Gifts in Kind

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will revise his current policy on the tax treatment of donations of gifts in kind to charities and trusts so that employers are able to donate without tax consequences; and if he will make a statement. [9569]

Mr. Jack: Tax relief for donations to charity is aimed at straightforward donations of money. If relief were to be extended to gifts in kind, there would have to be special arrangements to value them, which would complicate the present system. I do not propose to extend tax relief to donations of gifts in kind.

Official Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each of the Ministers in his Department how many official ministerial visits they have undertaken since 1 January; and how many of these have been abroad. [9375]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My ministerial colleagues and I have made the following official ministerial visits:

Chancellor of the Exchequer

29 December–12 January 1996: Argentina, Chile, Brazil

19–20 January: Paris (G7)

22 January: Brussels (ECOFIN)

19 February: Aberdeen (Grand Committee)

11 March: Brussels (ECOFIN)

15–24 March: South Africa, Zimbabwe

12–14 April: Verona (Informal ECOFIN)

14–16 April Sofia (EBRD)

20–23 April: Washington (IMF Spring Meetings)

3 May: City of London (Trial of the Pyx)

3 June: Luxembourg (ECOFIN)

20–22 June: Florence (European Council)

27–29 June: Lyon (G7 Summit)

8 July Brussels (ECOFIN)

15 July London (Inauguration of CREST)

20–22 September: Dublin (Informal ECOFIN)

24–26 September: Bermuda (Commonwealth Finance Ministers' Meeting)

27 September–3 October: IMF Autumn Meetings

14 October: Luxembourg (ECOFIN)

7–8 November: Bordeaux (Anglo-French Summit)

11 November: Brussels (ECOFIN)

2 December: Brussels (ECOFIN)

12 December: Dublin (ECOFIN)

13–14 December: Dublin (European Council)

Chief Secretary

29 January: Bank of England

1 April: France (G7 Jobs Summit)

20 May: GCHQ visit

10 June: London Underground

29 July: British Library visit

3 September: Bank of England

24 September: Bankside Power Station visit

27 September: Italy (Pontignano conference)

Financial Secretary

23 January: London (Inland Revenue office, Strand)

15 April: Manchester (Castlefield Tax Office)

22 April: Birmingham (Private Finance Initiative Roadshow event and Birmingham 5 Tax office)

8 May: London (Adjudicator's Office, Haymarket)

20 May: Wigan (Private Finance Initiative Roadshow)

6 June: Leeds (Private Finance Initiative Roadshow and the Leeds Royal Armouries)

25 June: Southampton (Private Finance Initiative Roadshow and a tax office)

1 July: Telford (self assessment tax office)

5 August: Manchester (tax office)

12 September: Belfast (Private Finance Initiative Seminar)

5 December: Newcastle (Private Finance Initiative Roadshow) and Longbenton (DSS office)

6 December: Blackpool (Self Assessment Agents/Employer Programme workshop)

Economic Secretary

9 January: Edinburgh (Small Firms)

7 February: Birmingham (Small Firms)

20 February: Nottingham (Small Firms Conference)

15 April: Canada (British Invisibles Speech: City Issues)

29 April: Leeds (Small Firms)

1 May: Brighton (Small Firms)

3 May: Durham (Visit to National Savings)

14 May: Basingstoke and Fleet (Small Firms)

20 May: OECD (Paris)

3 June: Norwich (Small Firms)

13 June: Dublin (Small Firms)

17 June: Crewe (Small Firms)

19 June: Plymouth (Small Firms)

10 July: Newport (Visit to ONS)

24 July: Edinburgh (Scottish Life Assurance Conference)

16 September: Canada

5 October: China

9 December: Edinburgh (Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce)

Exchequer Secretary

24 October: Publicity Event at Heathrow Airport

Paymaster General

21 March: Brussels (Speech at CIPFA Conference)

24 May: Greenock, Scotland (Opening Customs exhibition)

1 July: Crawley (Paymaster Agency Presentation)

ECOFIN

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the recent Council meeting of the Economic and Finance Ministers of the European Union. [9858]

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I represented the UK at the Economic and Finance Council—ECOFIN—of the European Union in Dublin on 12 December.

The Council agreed, subject to a parliamentary scrutiny reserve by the UK, its report on progress towards economic and monetary union, for presentation to the European Council meeting commencing the following day. The report considers the new exchange rate mechanism, the stability and growth pact and the legal framework for the introduction of the euro.

The Council also discussed new guarantee arrangements for the European Investment bank's lending and new regional lending mandates. Agreement was not reached, so the issue will be discussed again at a future ECOFIN meeting.

Pensions

Mr. Denham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what priority groups were established in the review of pension mis-selling; what were the definitions of the membership of each group; what initial deadlines were established for the completion of the review of each group; how many and what percentage of each group had their review completed by the relevant initial deadline; how many and what percentage of each group have now had their review completed; and by what date he expects the process to be complete. [9349]

Mrs. Angela Knight: In the Securities and Investments Board's guidance of October 1994 to self-regulating organisations and recognised professional bodies, five priority groups of personal pension holders were identified for automatic review. Any personal pension holder who wants his or her case reviewed can have it reviewed.

The priority groups, the characteristics of people in each group, and the targets which were set in 1994 for completion of reviews are set out in the table.

Priority groups	*Target date by which most cases ought to be reviewed*
Pension transfers, priority group 1 men aged 55 or over at the time of the transfer women aged 50 or over at the time of transfer people who have retired spouses and dependants of people who have died	31 December 1995
Pension transfers, priority group 2 men aged between 50 and 54 at the time of transfer women aged between 45 and 49 at the time of transfer	31 December 1996
Pension opt-outs, priority group 1 people who are retired/spouses or dependants of people who have died people who left an employer's scheme, were aged 35 or over at the time they took out a personal pension, and who are still with the same employer	31 December 1996
Pension opt-outs, priority group 2 people who did not join an employer's pension scheme, were aged 35 or over at the time they took out a personal pension, are paying their own money into a personal pension, and who are still with the same employer	30 June 1996
Pension opt-outs, priority group 3 people who left an employer's pension scheme, were aged under 35 at the time they took out a personal pension, are paying their own money into a personal pension and who are still with the same employer	31 December 1996
Pension opt-outs, priority group 4 people who left an employer's pension scheme, were aged 35 or over at the time they took out a personal pension and who are no longer with the same employer	31 December 1996

Data on the numbers of cases in each priority group that have been completed, and when, are not held centrally.

To speed up progress with the reviews, the SIB issued new guidance on 13 November 1996. By using the new streamlined approach in the guidance, it should be possible for investment firms to conclude case reviews more quickly and thus put matters right for investors more quickly too. At this stage, it is not clear how fast cases can now be progressed. The SIB now looks to the front-line regulators to assess what can be achieved by their members using the new guidance, and then to set and monitor challenging but appropriate targets for completing the review process.

Where suitable, personal pensions remain an excellent way for many people to secure income for their old age.

Land Transactions

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what change there have been in the guidance given by HM Treasury to Government Departments and non-departmental public bodies on the disposal of land and buildings and other land transactions since "DAO (GEN) 13/92", dated 23 July 1992; and if he will make a statement. [10296]

Mr. Jack: "DAO (GEN) 13/92" has been replaced by new guidance issued as "DAO (GEN) 11/96", dated 9 July 1996. The main changes and additions are the adoption of a less prescriptive approach, fuller guidance on the position of former owners and the Crichel Down rules, guidance on the definition of market value and the removal of the requirement for prior Treasury approval for certain types of disposal. Most of the new guidance is advisory rather than mandatory; market value is defined as the best price which can reasonably by obtained; and it is recognised that there may occasionally be cases where it will be reasonable to consider wider issues and accept a lower amount than the market value. A copy of the guidance has been placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

Arms Supplies (Rwanda)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library copies of the letters of 30 November 1995, 18 December 1995 and 26 August 1996 from the chairman of the United Nations special commission on arms supplies to Rwanda to the

international liaison sector of United Kingdom Customs and Excise; and if he will include the replies to the letters. [7524]

Mr. Oppenheim: It is not the normal practice of the commissioners of Customs and Excise to disclose publicly information provided to them in connection with their enforcement and investigation responsibilities. The letters from the United Nations special commission contain details provided in confidence to the United Kingdom's customs. Customs has, however, obtained the permission of the commission to make public this material. I am arranging for copies of these letters to be placed in the House Library.

When customs received copies of the letters dated 30 November 1995 and 18 December 1995, in November 1996, it found them to be requests relating to customs investigations which had already been the subject of discussions between customs investigators and commission officials on 10 January 1996. The letter of 26 August 1996 recalled the two earlier ones. Customs investigators have been in contact with commission officials and no further response to the commission letters is needed. The commission has expressed complete satisfaction with the co-operation received from the UK Government.

It would be inappropriate to discuss the material provided by customs in confidence to the UN commission. It is not customs' general practice to make public information about the existence or nature of any investigation of individuals or companies not yet accused of criminal offences, since to do so could risk prejudicing any on-going inquiries or future criminal prosecutions.

Tax and National Insurance Contributions

Ms Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals are *(a)* paying tax but not national insurance contributions, *(b)* paying more tax than national insurance contributions and *(c)* paying less tax than national insurance contributions, breaking the figures down by employment category and wage bands. [8264]

Mr. Jack: The latest estimates for 1996–97 are given in the table. National insurance contributions include both employee and the corresponding employer contributions. The three employment categories shown in the table are based on the classification used in Inland Revenue administrative systems. Inland Revenue administrative practice is to manage a taxpayer's affairs according to the "main source" of his/her income. For nearly all taxpayers this is either employment (schedule E) or self-employment (schedule D) income. In a small number of cases, the "main source" may not reflect his/her principal source of income.

Individuals paying income tax but not paying national insurance contributions (thousands)

Total Income[1] *£ per year*	*Main source*[2,3] *Schedule E employment income*	*Main Source*[2] *Schedule D self employment income*	*Other sources*[4]	*Total*
Under 5,000	160	30	220	410
5,000–10,000	320	100	1,890	2,310
10,000–15,000	160	50	880	1,090
15,000–20,000	70	20	390	480
20,000–25,000	30	10	180	220
25,000–30,000	20	10	170	100
30,000–40,000	20	10	70	100
Over 40,000	30	20	60	110
Total	810	250	3,760	4,820

[1] Total income for tax purposes.

[2] The description 'main source income' follows Inland Revenue administrative practice and reflects the classification used in Inland Revenue Statistics.

[3] These figures include employees over the pension age (65 for men, 60 for women) who do not pay national insurance contributions. However, contributions are paid by their employers, where their earnings exceed the Class 1 lower earnings limit.

[4] Includes pensions and investment income.

Individuals paying more income tax than national insurance contributions (thousands)

Total income £ per year	*Main source*[1] *Schedule E employment income*	*Main source*[1] *Schedule D self employment income*	*Other sources*[2]	*Total*
Under 5,000	10	—	—	10
5,000– 10,000	730	560	30	1,320
10,000– 15,000	1,150	650	50	1,850
15,000– 20,000	1,820	350	50	2,220
20,000– 25,000	1,820	190	20	2,030
25,000– 30,000	1,110	120	20	1,250
30,000– 40,000	900	130	20	1,050
Over 40,000	700	220	10	930
Total	8,240	2,220	200	10,660

[1] The description 'main source income' follows Inland Revenue administrative practice and reflects the classification used in Inland Revenue Statistics.

[2] Includes pensions and investment income.

Individuals paying less income tax than national insurance contributions (thousands)

Total income £ per year	*Main source*[1] *Schedule E employment income*	*Main source*[1] *Schedule D self employment income*	*Other sources*[2]	*Total*
Under 5,000	830	110	—	940
5,000– 10,000	3,810	230	10	4,050
10,000– 15,000	3,140	—	10	3,150
15,000– 20,000	1,440	—	—	1,440
20,000– 25,000	430	—	—	430
25,000– 30,000	70	—	—	70
30,000– 40,000	10	—	—	10
Over 40,000	—	—	—	—
Total	9,730	340	20	10,090

[1] The description "main source income" follows Inland Revenue administrative practice and reflects the classification used in Inland Revenue Statistics.

[2] Includes pensions and investment income.

Petrol Duty

Mr. Richards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer at what point in the supply process the tax point arises for duty *levied on petrol refined in the United Kingdom*, in the case of supply to *(a)* independent retailers and *(b)* supermarket petrol outlets; if he will make a statement on the reasons for any difference of treatment in the two cases; and what plans he has to review policy in this matter. [8519]

Mr. Oppenheim: The duty point at which the duty charge arises in respect of UK-refined petrol is the same regardless of whether it is supplied to independent retailers or supermarket forecourts. In both cases, the duty is charged at the time the product is supplied from the refinery for delivery to the UK domestic market.

Housebuilding

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultations he undertook with the housebuilding industry prior to the publication of the booklet "Are Your Workers Employed or Self-employed?"; what representations he has received from housebuilders since the publication; and if he will make a statement. [8320]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 December 1996]:* A wide range of bodies representing the construction industry, including housebuilders, were involved in consultations on employment status with officials from the Inland Revenue and the Department of Social Security. Since the publication of leaflet IR 148/CA69, "Are Your Workers Employed or Self-employed?" in October 1995 a number of representations have been received from the construction industry. Industry representatives have asked for more information about when contractors should complete their reviews of the employment status of their workers and make necessary changes. They have requested more time to implement those changes and help in explaining to their workers what a change in employment status means. The industry also sought an assurance that, by a given date, all construction firms must have made any necessary changes in the employment status of their workers and the deducting pay-as-you-earn and national insurance contributions so that there is a level playing field when firms compete for contracts. A new leaflet and a poster to help construction workers will be available in the new year. Details of the help provided for the industry on employment status are set out in a joint Inland Revenue and Contributions Agency press release issued on 19 November 1996, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to treat construction operatives in the housebuilding sector as self-employed for taxation purposes until such time as he has consulted *(a)* the Housebuilders Federation, *(b)* the Manufacturing and Construction Industries Alliance and *(c)* other bodies representing the interests of housebuilders and their workers. [8323]

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 12 December 1996]:* No. The law on employment status applies in the housebuilding sector in the same way as it does in any other industries. A wide range of representative bodies from the construction industry, including groups representing the housebuilding sector, have already been consulted on these issues. We shall continue to work closely with these representatives.

Gold Reserves

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 4 November, *Official Report*, column *544*, what proportion of British gold reserves are held outside the United Kingdom; and what proportion of the externally located gold reserves are held in western Europe. [3830]

Mrs. Angela Knight: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *544*. Because the number of appropriate locations is limited, for security reasons we do not disclose the amounts held at different sites. However, less than half the UK's gold reserves are physically located outside the United Kingdom. Of this, less than 1 per cent. of the total is located in western Europe.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Her Majesty's Government will assess the advantages of the redistribution of funds to the worst affected regions and countries along the lines proposed by the McDougal report to offset the effects of monetary union. [4753]

Mr. Oppenheim: The Government do not accept the case for any increase in fiscal transfers as a result of economic and monetary union. There are no implications for the EC budget, except that the euro will replace the ecu as the unit of account.

Incontinence Products

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to make adjustments to the NHS budget to compensate for extra expenses incurred as a result of the recent change in the regulations governing VAT on incontinence products; [9160]

(2) what estimates he has made of the revenue which will be raised from the recent changes in the regulations governing VAT on incontinence products. [9161]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* There have been no changes to the regulations governing VAT on incontinence products. VAT has always been chargeable on incontinence products supplied to the NHS. The policy was confirmed in October 1995 following evidence of contrived tax avoidance schemes; but customs set guidelines to enable recovery of tax in cases where NHS trusts truly acted as agents for suppliers or patients. It later became clear that these arrangements did not reflect the normal position in the NHS, and they were withdrawn in August 1996. Few NHS trusts are thought to have used the guidelines, but details are not held centrally and so no reliable revenue estimates can be made. However, the NHS is in any case funded on the basis that its purchases of incontinence products are taxable.

Incontinence products supplied directly to disabled people are zero-rated.

Earned Income

Mr. Timms: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the average earned income in the most recent year for which figures are available for *(a)* the fifth percentile and *(b)* the 95th percentile of taxpayers. [9570]

Mr. Jack: Based on the estimation of earned income for taxpayers in 1997–98, the fifth percentile is about £4,200 and the 95th percentile is about £36,000.

Tobacco Smuggling

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to take further action against those involved in the illegal importation of cigarettes and tobacco; and if he will make a statement. [9655]

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced as part of his Budget package, Customs and Excise is to deploy 70 additional front-line staff to combat single market smuggling of alcohol and tobacco. There will be increases in intelligence and investigation staff to deal with excise fraud and evasion.

Diesel Duty

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the levels of duty and VAT on diesel in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* France, *(c)* Germany and *(d)* Belgium. [9130]

Mr. Oppenheim: The information is shown in the following table:

Country	*Excise duty on diesel Pence per litre*	*Duty plus VAT[1] Pence per litre*	*VAT rate on diesel Per cent.*
United Kingdom	36.86	43.31	17.5
France	29.0	34.97	20.6
Germany	27.0	31.05	15
Belgium	24.8	30.01	21

[1] Because the amount of VAT depends on the retail price, the figure shown here is duty plus consequential VAT on the duty element of the price.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many VAT (i) registrations and (ii) deregistrations there have been in each Customs and Excise area in each year since 1990–91. [9741]

Mr. Oppenheim: Customs holds registration and deregistration information by local office and groups these offices to form collections. The information, by collection, is in the schedule.

However, changes in collection boundaries over the years make year-on-year comparisons between them inappropriate in some cases.

Registrations and deregistrations by calendar year

Collection	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Registrations						
Northern Ireland	4,226	3,607	3,674	4,034	3,652	3,735
Central England	22,257	18,239	18,983	17,735	16,161	16,216
Anglia	17,436	15,347	14,087	14,350	13,083	10,744
South-east England	16,122	13,562	12,403	12,689	11,522	7,019
South England	18,813	15,544	13,934	14,295	13,056	13,348
Thames Valley	25,524	21,723	20,478	20,956	19,999	19,362
London Central	15,840	13,907	14,194	13,705	12,468	15,529
London South and Thames	9,303	8,018	7,519	11,176	10,171	12,307
East England	22,923	19,599	17,559	18,280	16,665	16,380
North-west England	20,574	18,645	17,326	16,412	15,174	15,174
North England	19,180	16,362	15,374	15,331	14,081	13,522
Scotland	15,350	13,395	12,792	12,966	11,985	12,204
Wales West and Borders	25,381	21,578	20,066	20,030	18,621	15,931
Deregistrations						
Northern Ireland	3,113	3,783	3,595	3,176	3,495	3,099
Central England	16,799	22,540	22,082	20,822	17,979	17,506
Anglia	13,851	21,972	19,977	17,511	16,303	11,034
South-east England	11,648	19,650	18,342	15,906	14,317	7,885
South England	14,782	21,828	20,813	19,457	16,422	14,810
Thames Valley	17,943	24,925	25,509	23,518	21,162	19,048
London Central	12,666	15,779	17,109	14,818	11,905	12,991
London South and Thames	7,531	9,247	8,989	10,546	9,604	12,187
East England	18,483	24,212	22,424	21,145	18,729	17,727
North-west England	16,015	21,486	21420	20,752	18,600	17,065
North England	16,154	20,649	18,904	17,427	16,955	17,261
Scotland	12,619	15,399	13,790	14,206	12,877	12,666
Wales West and Borders	20,773	27,797	25,691	25,236	23,346	17,616

Registrations and deregistrations by financial year

Collection	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Registrations						
Northern Ireland	4,195	3,600	3,759	4,000	3,666	3,744
Central England	20,639	17,968	17,593	16,685	16,469	16,362
Anglia	16,166	12,695	14,104	14,230	13,470	10,481
South-east England	14,067	10,682	12,439	12,405	11,339	6,946
South England	17,621	14,956	13,853	13,984	12,979	13,485
Thames Valley	24,028	21,201	20,108	20,899	20,325	19,476
London Central	15,197	12,564	13,946	13,472	12,456	15,930
London South and Thames	8,349	8,043	8,328	10,857	9,588	12,118
East England	21,492	18,677	17,919	17,402	17,028	16,165
North-west England	20,752	18,091	17,003	15,876	15,064	14,611
North England	18,350	15,777	15,382	14,817	13,795	13,604
Scotland	15,020	12,799	12,891	12,682	12,103	12,243
Wales West and Borders	23,605	23,531	19,993	19,621	17,771	16,010
Deregistrations						
Northern Ireland	3,128	3,934	3,303	3,417	3,280	3,160
Central England	17,007	23,887	21,698	20,607	17,593	16,622
Anglia	14,443	20,244	19,332	17,924	15,283	10,703
South-east England	11,544	17,115	17,600	16,121	13,193	7,705
South England	15,185	22,852	20,675	18,065	16,687	15,149
Thames Valley	18,641	26,612	24,822	23,514	20,130	18,630
London Central	12,848	15,905	16,197	14,222	11,558	12,767
London South and Thames	7,680	9,610	6,999	11,151	8,696	11,701
East England	18,839	25,010	21,822	21,197	18,851	17,651
North-west England	15,971	23,017	20,868	21,104	17,304	16,750
North England	16,470	21,289	18,708	17,030	16,665	16,759
Scotland	12,852	15,777	13,368	14,458	12,316	12,664
Wales West and Borders	21,516	29,357	25,971	25,396	21,996	17,163

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Southall Horse Market

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has in respect of the Southall horse market following the recent visit by his officials; and if he will make a statement. [8690]

Mrs. Browning: The Ministry has no proposals for Southall horse market. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 25 November, *Official Report*, column *102*.

Livestock (Medicinal Products)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what legislation governs the use of medicinal products in farm animals, including products described as for growth promotion or performance enhancement; and if he will make a statement; [9302]

(2) if he will list the current legislation relating to the use of antibiotics and other antimicrobial substances in the feed of adult and breeding cattle, indicating the date such legislation came into force; and if he will make a statement. [9192]

Mrs. Browning: The legislation governing the use of medicinal products used for growth promotion or performance enhancement in farm animals and relating to the use of antibiotics and other antimicrobial substances in the feed of adult and breeding cattle is Council directive 70/524/EEC, which came into force on 23 November 1970.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the annual consumption of *(a)* pharmacy and merchants' list antibiotics and *(b)* other antimicrobial substances for each class of livestock since 1966; and if he will make a statement; [9191]

(2) what was the annual consumption of prescription only medicine antibiotics and other antimicrobial substances for each class of livestock since 1966; and if he will make a statement; [9198]

(3) what statistics he collates on the annual consumption of prescription-only medicine antibiotics and other antimicrobial substances for each class of livestock; and if he will make a statement; [9197]

(4) what statistics his Department collates on the annual consumption of *(a)* pharmacy and merchants' list antibiotics and *(b)* other antimicrobial substances for each class of livestock; and if he will make a statement. [9199]

Mrs. Browning: The Government do not hold information on the annual consumption of antibiotics of antimicrobial substances for use with livestock.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the *(a)* antibiotics and *(b)* other antimicrobial substances currently licensed for use in the (i) feed and (ii) water of *(x)* dairy cows and *(y)* other lactating ruminants, indicating the date of licence; and if he will make a statement. [9193]

Mrs. Browning: Information on antibiotics and other antimicrobial substances currently licensed for use in the feed and water of dairy cows and other lactating ruminants is listed.

Active ingredient	*Date first licence issued*
Procaine Penicillin	22 December 1971
Amoxycillin	6 February 1984
Ampicillin	11 June 1974
Cefquinome	8 November 1993
Ceftiofur	30 December 1991
Cephalexin	16 July 1991
Cefoperazone	5 June 1985
Cefuroxime	7 April 1987
Cephacetrile Sodium	20 October 1985
Cloxacillin	11 June 1974
Cephalonium	1 January 1992
Chlortetracycline	29 March 1985
Oxytetracycline	22 December 1971
Apramycin	2 September 1992
Framycetin Sulphate	24 September 1974
Neomycin Sulphate	8 November 1973
Spectinomycin	15 October 1992
Streptomycin Sulphate	6 August 1973
Erythromycin	29 March 1985
Tilmicosin	14 September 1988
Tylosin	31 August 1972
Florfenicol	13 December 1994
Sulphadimidine	6 June 1973
Sulphamethoxypyridazine	6 January 1989
Enrofloxacin	6 February 1991
Danofloxacin mesylate	22 January 1993
Marbofloxacin	10 February 1995
Benzathine Penicillin/Procaine Penicillin	4 April 1985
Amoxycillin/Clavulanic Acid	11 December 1986 (potassium cluvulante)
Dihydrostreptomycin/Streptomycin	1 September 1982
Baquiloprim/Sulphadimidine	20 November 1991
Trimethoprim/Sulphadiazine	30 September 1982
Trimethoprim/Sulfadoxine	23 April 1990
Trimethoprim/Sulfatroxazole	3 July 1989
Trimethoprim/Sulphachlorpyridazine	13 November 1988
Neomycin/Streptomycin	20 October 1983
Procaine Penicillin/Dihydrostreptomycin	29 March 1985
Procaine Penicillin/Neomycin	29 March 1985
Ampicillin/Cloxacillin	14 August 1980
Chloretracycline HC1/Dihydrostreptomycin	29 March 1985
Chlortetracycline/Dihydrostreptomycin/Neomycin Sulphate	29 March 1985
Dihydrostreptomycin/Procaine Penicillin	29 March 1985
Framycetin/Dihydrostreptomycin	29 March 1985
Framycetin/Procaine Penicillin	29 March 1985
Novobiocin/Procaine Penicillin	23 March 1979
Benzyl Penicillin/Neomycin/Procaine Penicillin	27 June 1991
Benzyl Penicillin/Dihydrostreptomycin/Nafcillin	26 August 1976
Neomycin/Procaine Penicillin Streptomycin	29 March 1985
Dihydrostreptomycin/Neomycin/Novobiocin/ Procaine Penicillin	29 March 1985
Dihydrostreptomycin/Nafcillin/Procaine Penicillin	26 August 1976
Neomycin/Procaine Penicillin	29 March 1985
Avoparcin	9 October 1972
Bacitracin Zinc	1 September 1972
Bambermycin	29 April 1987
Spiramycin	1 September 1972
Virginiamycin	1 February 1983
Monensin Sodium	16 November 1973

Active ingredient	*Cattle*	*Sheep*	*Other species*	*Legal category*
Procaine Penicillin	X	X		POM
Amoxycillin	X	X		POM
Ampicillin	X	X		POM
Cefquinome	X			POM
Ceftiofur	X			POM
Cephalexin	X	X		POM
Cefoperazone	X			POM
Cefuroxime	X			POM
Cephacetrile Sodium	X			POM
Cloxacillin	X	X		POM
Cephalonium	X			POM
Chlortetracycline	X			POM
Oxytetracycline	X	X	Deer	POM
Apramycin	X	X		POM
Framycetin Sulphate	X			POM
Neomycin Sulphate	X	X		POM
Spectinomycin	X	X		POM
Streptomycin Sulphate	X	X	Goats	POM
Erythormycin	X			POM
Tilmicosin	X			POM
Tylosin	X			POM
				PML
Florfenicol	X			POM
Sulphadimidine	X			POM
Sulphamethoxypyridazine	X	X		POM
Enrofloxacin	X			POM
Danofloxacin mesylate	X			POM
Marbofloxacin	X			POM
Benzathine Penicillin/Procaine Penicillin	X	X		POM
Amoxycillin/Clavulanic Acid	X			POM
Dihydrostreptomycin/Streptomycin	X	X		POM
Baquiloprim/Sulphadimidine	X			POM
Trimethoprim/Sulphadiazine	X	X		POM
Trimethoprim Sulfadoxine	X			POM
Trimethoprim/Sulfatroxazole	X	X		POM
Trimethoprim/Sulphachlorpyridazine	X			POM
Neomycin/Streptomycin		X		POM
Procaine Penicillin/Dihydrostreptomycin	X	X		POM
Procaine Penicillin/Neomycin	X	X		POM
Ampicillin/Cloxacillin	X			POM
Chloretracycline HC1/Dihydrostreptomycin	X			POM
Chlortetracycline/Dihydrostreptomycin/ Neomycin Sulphate	X			POM
Dihydrostreptomycin/Procaine Penicillin	X			POM
Framycetin/Dihydrostreptomycin	X			POM
Framycetin/Procaine Penicillin	X			POM
Novobiocin/Procaine Penicillin	X			POM
Benzyl Penicillin/Neomycin/Procaine Penicillin	X			POM
Benzyl Penicillin/Dihydrostreptomycin/Nafcillin	X			POM
Neomycin/Procaine Penicillin/Streptomycin	X			POM
Dihydrostreptomycin/Neomycin/ Novobiocin/Procain Penicillin	X			POM
Dihydrostreptomycin/Nafcillin/Procain Penicillin	X			POM
Neomycin/Procaine Penicillin	X	X		POM
Avoparcin	X	X		PML
Bacitracin Zinc	X	X		PML
Bambermycin	X			PML
Spiramycin	X	X	Goats	PML 2/ POM /4
Virginiamycin	X			PML
Monensin Sodium	X			PML

Correspondence

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the reasons for the time taken to reply to the letter of 24 June sent to him by the chairman of the consumers in Europe group concerning BSE; and when he expects to be able to send a reply. [9663]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I replied to the letter of 24 June from the chairman of the consumers in Europe group on 17 December 1996. As I explained in my reply, the letter was regrettably and inadvertently mislaid among the very substantial press of other correspondence on this issue.

WALES

Official Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each of the Ministers in his Department how many official ministerial visits they have undertaken since 1 January; and how many of these have been abroad. [9386]

Mr. Hague: The information is as follows:

Secretary of State (Mr. William Hague): 174 visits of which 3 were abroad

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Mr. Gwilym Jones): 128 visits of which 7 were abroad

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Mr. Jonathan Evans): 89 visits of which 2 were abroad

(Former Parliamentary Under Secretary of State) (Mr. Rod Richards): 52 visits of which 1 was abroad.

Primary School Class Sizes

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each year group in maintained primary schools the class size figures as tabulated for all registered classes in maintained primary schools in table 3.6 of "Statistics of Educational Training in Wales: Schools No. 4, 1996". [9588]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Information on class size is not collected by year group.

Domestic Telephones

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what proportion of households in Wales in which state benefits are the main source of income do not have a telephone; [9358]

(2) what proportion of households in Wales do not have a telephone; [9356]

(3) what proportion of pensioner households in Wales do not have a telephone. [9357]

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Information on telephone access in Wales is available from two different sample surveys; the Department of Social Security's family resources survey and the Office for National Statistics' family expenditure survey.

Based on the former, 13 per cent. of households in Wales did not have a telephone in 1994–95. The corresponding figure for households where state benefits accounted for more than half of gross weekly household income was 23 per cent. For households where the head of household was over the state retirement age the figure was 12 per cent.

From the latter, the estimate of the proportion of Welsh households without a telephone was 10 per cent. in 1995–96. This survey has a smaller sample size than the former and so these estimates are less reliable, particularly for smaller sub-groups.

Staff

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* non-permanent staff there have been in (i) his Department and (ii) executive agencies of his Department in each year since 1992. [9617]

Mr. Hague: The numbers of permanent and non-permanent staff employed by my Department and its executive agency since 1992 are set out in the table:

	Welsh Office		*Cadw*	
	Permanent	*Non Permanent*	*Permanent*	*Non Permanent*
1 January 1992	2425	125	—	—
1 January 1993	2159.5	137.5	262.5	3
1 January 1994	2183	230	217	9
1 January 1995	2070.5	213.5	222	7.5
1 December 1996	1903.5	177	179.6	7.3

1. Cadw was established as an Executive Agency on 1 April 1992.
2. The 1992 figures include OHMCI staff.

Information Technology (Euro)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what tenders his Department has put out to convert its information technology systems to be euro-compliant; what are the cost and person hours required to convert the systems to handle the euro; and when he expects his Department's systems to be fully economic and monetary union compliant. [9458]

Mr. Hague: My Department and agency will need to assess the impact which a single currency, assumed to be starting on 1 January 1999, would have on their information systems, whether or not the United Kingdom decides to participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union.

Housing Associations

Sir Wyn Roberts: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his proposals for changing the arrangements for paying tax relief grant to Welsh housing associations; and if he will make a statement. [10460]

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Department received 11 responses in August following the publication of our consultation paper "Proposals for Changes to the Tax Relief Grant Arrangements for Housing Associations in Wales". Most respondents called for more time to plan for withdrawal of the grant and for greater certainty about future rates of payment and some also saw advantages in gearing transitional assistance towards smaller housing associations.

I am pleased to respond to these concerns by setting out our intentions for future years with payments being set on a sliding scale. In 1997–98, claims will be met in full as originally proposed; in 1998–99, we plan to pay 75 per cent. of the first £50,000 of eligible claims, and 50 per cent of the rest; and in 1999–2000, we plan to pay 50 per cent. of the first £25,000 of eligible claims, and 25 per cent. of the rest.

The Government do not believe that continued expenditure on tax relief grant represents the most

effective way of using the finite resources that are available to meet social housing need. We therefore remain committed to its abolition when an appropriate legislative opportunity arises. In the meantime, although the statutory discretion to pay tax relief grant will remain, the Government would normally expect that, following the planned reductions outlined, associations will plan to manage without tax relief grant payments.

A list of respondents to the consultation paper has been placed in the Library of the House, and this contains a contact point in the Welsh Office for copies of individual responses.

Departmental Activities

Mr. Richards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his Department's activities since April 1992. [214]

Mr. Hague: Details of the Department's activities since 1992 are set out in full in the Welsh Office departmental reports for the relevant years. The key achievements include the following.

The Department has worked with local government to ensure a smooth transition to the new pattern of 22 unitary authorities. It is extending the influence of local government in Wales by cutting unnecessary central controls under its "redefining the relationship" initiative. It has exerted pressure on local authorities to secure value for money through the use of compulsory competitive tendering and associated financial targets. Council tax was successfully introduced on 1 April 1993.

The Department has supported local authorities' responsibilities under the NHS and Community Care Act 1990 for arranging community care services to meet individuals' needs. Through the mental handicap strategy it has helped to develop community-based support for individuals with a mental handicap and to improve the quality of care. The Department supports voluntary organisations which represent the interests of, and promote the development of services for, people with disabilities, older people, children and carers across Wales. It promotes volunteering through the "make a difference" initiative.

The incidence of homelessness has been reduced. More people own their homes and more homes are available in the social rented sector, with over 16,000 additional dwellings provided by housing associations between 1992–93 and 1995–96. There has been substantial investment in the renovation of private sector homes, with over 64,000 grants being made to a value exceeding £709 million over the same period. Through estate partnership there has been additional expenditure of over £30 million to address the problems of the worst council estates. The publication of the housing White Paper, "Our Future Homes", in June 1995 and the subsequent legislation set the framework for the future.

As part of the unique Welsh people and prosperity programme, "A Bright Future" is a comprehensive plan of action to raise educational standards and performance for all pupils; the results of statutory tests, public examinations and the views of the independent office of Her Majesty's inspector of schools in Wales demonstrate that standards are now at record levels. The Government have increased parental choice and diversity of provision through continued support to voluntary-aided schools through a unique Welsh initiative which enables popular schools to expand doubling the number of children able to take up assisted places at good independent schools in Wales the option for schools to go grant-maintained and the introduction of nursery vouchers from next April. The Government have made possible record levels of participation in higher and further education. The charters for parents and students make clear their opportunities, rights and responsibilities.

The Government have established an independent Arts Council of Wales. National lottery funding via the Arts Council of Wales and the Sports Council for Wales is providing an additional £15 million each year for the arts and for sport. Funding has been provided for new galleries in the main national museums and galleries building in Cardiff and a major extension of the national library of Wales. Support for the Welsh language has continued through record levels of grant and the implementation of the Welsh Language Act 1993.

Since 1992, the structure of the NHS—the reforms were introduced in April 1991—has been developed by:

- completing the transfer of all hospital, community and ambulance service to NHS trust status;
- encouraging General Practitioners to become fundholders—currently 52 per cent. of patients have a fundholding GP;
- reorganising the 17 health authorities in Wales to five new health authorities with an eventual saving of £8 million per year.

The quality of service has been greatly improved by the implementation of the patients charter for Wales. This set standards and guarantees for a wide variety of NHS activities including waiting times for hospital appointments and treatments which showed significant improvements. The results are published each year in performance tables of hospital improvements.

The efficiency of the NHS has also greatly improved. Cumulative savings of £380 million have been achieved since 1992–93 enabling, for example, the number of in-patients treated to increase by 17 per cent.

The Welsh Office Health Department has encouraged a wide variety of initiatives and developments to improve the service provided by the NHS, including research and development, health promotion and activities to improve the effectiveness of treatments.

A report of the Welsh Office's chief medical officer on the health of the people of Wales has been published for each year from 1992 to 1995.

In 1992–93, provision for the NHS in Wales was £1.877 billion. In 1996–97, the provision is £2.274 billion, which represents an increase of 21 per cent. in cash terms and 10.1 per cent. in real terms.

Since 1992, the Welsh Office has played a full part in the development and implementation of the common agricultural and common fisheries policies, including the

ADAS

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he will take to ensure that the benefits of his Department's future research and development carried out by ADAS continue to be made available to the industry as a whole following privatisation. [10464]

Mr. Boswell: We are well aware of the need to ensure that Department-funded research results continue to be properly exploited to the benefit of the industry as a whole. Where existing intellectual property rights are sold with ADAS business, we will attach appropriate conditions which may include a requirement on the purchaser to grant non-exclusive licences to third parties to exploit the intellectual property. Future contracts with the privatised company will specify the arrangements for ownership of the intellectual property rights and the conditions attached to such ownership.

Mammalian Meat and Bonemeal (Transport)

Mr. Martin Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received concerning potential cross-contamination from the transport of mammalian meat and bonemeal in vehicles that are also used to transport grain; and if he will make a statement. [7946]

Mrs. Browning *[pursuant to his reply, 10 December 1996, c. 106]:* I have been further advised by my officials that we are aware of two letters on this issue which have been received.

"New Labour's Expenditure Plans"

Mr. Derek Foster: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what costs quoted in the document "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" were prepared in his Department; what detailed assumptions and interpretations were provided to officials in his Department and to enable preparation of each cost; and what was the total cost to public funds of preparing each estimate. [6353]

Mr. Hogg: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in conjunction with the Treasury, prepared the factual material relating to costings published in "New Labour's Public Expenditure Plans" numbered 4, 5 and 6. The detailed assumptions and interpretations that were provided to officials are set out in my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary's reply to the right hon. Gentleman on 17 December 1996. It is not normal working practice to keep a record of the time spent in providing factual information to Ministers and it is not therefore possible to offer a reliable estimate of the costs involved.

Frozen Meat

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assessment he has made of the health risks from meat sold as fresh which has previously been frozen; [7361]

(2) how he ensures that the public are informed of health risks from meat sold as fresh which had previously been frozen. [7364]

Mrs. Browning: The law currently requires the name of a food to include reference to its physical condition or treatment—for example, frozen—if omission of such information would mislead the consumer.

The health risks associated with meat which has been previously frozen are no greater than those from meat which has not been previously frozen. Provided the meat is cooked thoroughly and kept free from cross-contamination after cooking, it will be safe to eat. The long-standing Government advice has been widely disseminated in Government publicity on food safety for many years.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what representations he has received to restore the requirement that meat sold as fresh which had previously been frozen should be clearly so labelled; [7365]

(2) what are the legal requirements on meat retailers concerning the specific labelling of meat sold as fresh which had previously been frozen; [7363]

(3) what guidance he has issued to meat retailers concerning the labelling of meat sold as fresh which had previously been frozen. [7366]

Mrs. Browning: Specific labelling requirements for meat and offal previously frozen were removed at the behest of the EC Commission as being at variance with harmonised EC labelling rules. No representations have been received seeking their restoration. None the less, the law currently requires the name of a food to include reference to its physical condition or treatment—for example, previously frozen—if omission of such information would mislead the purchaser. We shall be adding to the guidance notes on the food labelling regulations further advice on the way food processes and treatments should be indicated.

Cattle Cull

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his current estimate of the number of animals remaining to be culled in the over-30-month cull scheme; and if he will make a statement. [7913]

Mr. Baldry: The backlog of animals waiting to be slaughtered under the over-30-month scheme has now been eliminated in Great Britain and will very shortly be cleared in Northern Ireland. Cattle will therefore be able to be presented for the scheme at their normal point of slaughter, as originally intended.

Animals (Identification)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many and what percentage of *(a)* farm and *(b)* domestic animals were (i) identified and (ii) newly identified by (1) a microchip and (2) a tattoo in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9654]

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* This information for farm animals is not collected centrally. Questions relating to domestic animals are a matter for the Home Department.

Beef Exports (South Africa)

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much UK beef was exported to South Africa in each of the years 1991 to 1995 and for each month in 1996 until the imposition of the EU export ban; and how much of this in each period was *(a)* frozen, *(b)* chilled, *(c)* fresh and *(d)* preserved or prepared. [9225]

Mrs. Browning: It is not possible separately to identify exports of beef of UK origin from those of non-UK origin. However, exports of beef from the UK to South Africa, as recorded in the overseas trade statistics, were as follows:

Beef exports to South Africa 1991–95

		1991	*1992*	*1993*	*[1]1994*	*[1]1995*
(a) Frozen beef	tonnes	1,722	755	3,123	10,263	27,011
	value (£'000s)	1,617	787	3,929	9,364	23,744
(b) + (c) Fresh and chiled beef [2]	tonnes	0	21	47	61	46
	value (£'000s)	0	28	27	75	90
(d) Beef prepared and preserved	tonnes	0	0	1	0	0
	value (£'000s)	0	0	3	0	0
Total Volume	tonnes	1,722	776	3,171	10,324	27,057
Total Value	value (£'000s)	1,617	815	3,960	9,439	23.834

[1] Date provisional and subject to amendment.
[2] Exports of fresh and chilled beef are not separately available.

Beef exports to South Africa 1996

		January[1]	*February[1]*	*March[1]*	*1996 Total[1]*
(a) Frozen beef	tonnes	879	2,212	1,893	4,985
	value (£000s)	965	1,883	1,513	4,361
(b) + (c) Fresh and chilled beef [2]	tonnes	0	0	0	0
	value (£000s)	0	0	0	0
(d) Beef prepared and preserved	tonnes	0	0	0	0
	value (£000s)	0	0	0	0
Total Volume	tonnes	879	2,212	1,893	4,985
Total Value	value (£000s)	965	1,883	1,513	4,361

[1] Data provisional and subject to amendment.
[2] Exports of fresh and chilled beef are not separately available.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the level of the EC export refund given on beef exports to South Africa currently; and what it was in each of the years 1991 to 1995. [9226]

Mr. Baldry: There are 92 separate rates of export refund covering the export of beef and beef products from the EC to South Africa. However, when beef was exported from the UK to South Africa it tended to be in two categories: fresh chilled boneless cuts from the hindquarters of adult male bovines—special export refund beef; and other fresh chilled or frozen boneless cuts. These are set out with their current rate of export refund:

SER beef: 274 ECU/100 kg

Other fresh chilled or frozen boneless cuts: 145.5 ECU/100 kg.

During the years 1991 to 1995 different rates applied at different times. A list of these is in the table, together with the agricultural conversion—green—rates which convert these into sterling.

	ECU/100 kg	
Date	*Special export refund*	*Other fresh/chilled and frozen*
16 July 1991	312.00	165.00
31 July 1993	296.00	157.00
27 November 1993	281.50	149.00
29 January 1994	267.50	141.50
4 August 1994	267.50	141.50
26 November 1994	254.00	134.50
1 February 1995	306.71	162.41
17 February 1995	306.50	162.50
21 September 1995	296.00	157.00
14 October 1995	281.00	149.00
11 November 1995	267.00	141.50
18 November 1995	200.00	106.00
13 December 1995	227.00	120.50
11 February 1996	244.00	129.50
1 May 1996	274.00	145.50

Green rate

Ref. wef date	*Value*
14 May 1990	0.795232
17 June 1991	0.795423
17 September 1992	0.808227
22 September 1992	0.818896
19 November 1992	0.880533
26 November 1992	0.897525
1 January 1993	0.939052
1 February 1993	0.951031
3 February 1993	0.968391
1 March 1993	0.980715
11 April 1993	0.978559
21 April 1993	0.970726
27 April 1993	0.964017
28 May 1993	0.959111
1 July 1993	0.948645
21 July 1993	0.937041
24 July 1993	0.930787
1 August 1993	0.920969
1 July 1994	0.932453
14 July 1994	0.946550
21 August 1994	0.953575
11 September 1994	0.953575
1 February 1995	0.789704
17 February 1995	0.799794
21 February 1995	0.805837
6 March 1995	0.807419
16 March 1995	0.821220
26 March 1995	0.829882
15 April 1995	0.833125
25 April 1995	0.836385
15 May 1995	0.840997
4 July 1995	0.843954
18 November 1995	0.854276
21 November 1995	0.856563
17 June 1996	0.833821
1 November 1996	0.809915

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Minster of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the quantity of beef exports to South Africa which has been re-exported to the EU from *(a)* Botswana, *(b)* Namibia, *(c)* Swaziland or *(d)* Lesotho since 1991. [9227]

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is not available.

Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for his Department *(a)* how many people in total are employed, *(b)* how many of the total number of staff are (i) male and (ii) female and *(c)* how many (I) men and (II) women are employed on a (1) full-time and (2) part-time basis. [9482]

Mr. Boswell: The number of men and women employed on a full-time and part-time basis in the Department on 1 October 1996 was as follows:

	Number
Full time	
Male	3,518
Female	2,795
Part time	
Male	43
Female	516
Total	
Male	5,561
Female	3,311
Staff	6,872

The table does not include figures for the Department's executive agencies.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* non-permanent staff there have been in (i) his Department and (ii) executive agencies of his Department in each year since 1992. [9621]

Mr. Boswell: Information on the numbers of permanent and casual staff in the Department and its executive agencies in each year since 1992 can be found in the civil service staff in post summary tables, copies of which can be found in the Library of the House.

Fishing Rights

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what classes of French fishing vessels are prohibited from fishing within the French 12-mile limit. [9573]

Mr. Sackville: I have been asked to reply.

In those areas where French vessels are permitted to fish within 12 miles of the Bailiwick of Guernsey, no distinction is made between classes of vessel.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons the area agreement for French fishing vessels to fish inside the British fisheries limit of 12 miles around Guernsey and for British vessels to fish within the French 12-mile limit was not ratified by France. [9572]

Mr. Sackville: I have been asked to reply.

A temporary agreement with France covering these waters was recently terminated by the United Kingdom at the request of the Guernsey authorities, who did not think it operated in a way which was fair to the Bailiwick.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what rights French fisherman currently have to fish within the Sark box. [9574]

Mr. Sackville: I have been asked to reply.

The position in international law is disputed, and the matter is currently the subject of discussion with France.

TRANSPORT

Transport Council

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the result of the Transport Council held in Brussels on 12 and 13 December. [10339]

Sir George Young: The Transport Council met in Brussels on 12 and 13 December. My noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping represented the United Kingdom.

The Council agreed a common position on the Commission's proposals for a directive on road passenger cabotage—replacing directive 2454/92 which was annulled for technical reasons by the European Court of Justice. The UK said that it would vote against the text when formally adopted, because much of the original proposals for further liberalisation had been removed from the text. This was the only item on which the question of a vote arose.

The Council also agreed a common position on a proposed amendment to Council regulation 684/92, on further liberalisation of international bus and coach services.

The Council held orientation debates on the Commission's White Paper on the future of the Community's railways, and on proposals for the introduction of new digital tachograph technology to replace the mechanical recording devices currently required for buses and lorries.

The Council agreed conclusions endorsing the Commission's proposals to take forward negotiations on a land transport agreement with Switzerland. It also discussed proposals for a replacement to directive 93/89—also annulled by the European Court of Justice on technical grounds—on taxation and road user charges for heavy goods vehicles. It was agreed that this issue would be taken forward under the Netherlands presidency of the EU in parallel with discussions on fuel excise duties.

The Council held an orientation debate on air traffic management in the EU, and agreed conclusions noting the urgent need to adopt the new Eurocontrol convention. The Council agreed a common position on a proposed regulation increasing and harmonising the liability of Community air carriers in case of accident to passengers.

The Commission reported to the Council on its negotiations on air transport relations with the United States, and gave a presentation on proposals for a mandate to negotiate Community membership of a new European Aviation Safety Authority.

The Council reached political agreement on a proposed directive on safety standards for fishing vessels and on a proposed amendment to directive 93/75 on reporting requirements for ships carrying dangerous or polluting goods.

The Council agreed a resolution promoting a maritime strategy for the Community. The UK opposed two elements of the strategy—on employment-related operating subsidies, and on restrictive manning practices—which were therefore excluded from the resolution itself and were covered separately by presidency conclusions supported by the Commission and the other delegations.

The Council discussed the recent lorry blockades in France and Greece and the question of compensation.

The Council discussed summer time, and received progress reports from the Commission on a number of other issues, which were not debated.

Red Routes

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has undertaken an accident study of the pilot priority red route in north London since its introduction. [10471]

Mr. Bowis: The report "A Pilot Red Route Accident Study", commissioned by the Traffic Director for London, has been prepared by the consultants TecnEcon. The report analyses casualty data covering the three years since the pilot scheme was implemented and draws comparisons with the three yeas before the pilot scheme began. It covers the pilot scheme "rat runs" and other roads in the immediate area which were likely to be affected as a result of improvements in traffic flow on the pilot scheme and traffic calming measures. It concludes that the number of people injured in road accidents on or near London's pilot red route has fallen by 15.4 per cent. since the scheme became operational in 1993, and shows impressive reductions in the number of severe casualties—down 32.8 per cent.—and in the number of pedestrians injured—down 29.9 per cent. I have arranged for a copy of the report to be placed in the Library.

Bus Working Group

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the members of the bus working group, *(b)* its terms of reference, *(c)* the number of meetings it has held and *(d)* the reports it has produced; and if he will place copies of its reports in the Library. [10271]

Mr. Watts: Under my chairmanship, the bus working group comprises representatives from the Confederation of Passenger Transport, the Joint Local Authority Associations and the National Federation of Bus Users. In addition to the senior traffic commissioner and officials from the Department of Transport and the Scottish and Welsh Offices, who also attend meetings of the group, the following attended the most recent meetings, held on 19 September:

Local authority representatives

Councillor M. Dowd

Councillor J. Lingard

Mr. D. Bannerman

Mr. R. Bristowe

Mr. J. Carr

Mr. V. Christie

Mr. B. Dobbs

Ms A. Livesey

Mr. K. Manton

Mr. P. Morgan.

Confederation of Passenger Transport

Mr. T. Smallwood

Mrs. V. Palmer

Mr. D. Flower.

National Federation of Bus Users

Dr. C. Cahm

Mr. J. Cartledge.

The group has no formal terms of reference. Its remit is to examine ways of improving the provision of bus services within the privatised and deregulated framework.

The group has met five times since it was re-established in its present form last year. In addition, there have been a number of meetings of four sub-groups.

My predecessor as chairman, the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), reported on the group's work in a press statement on 8 January. More recently, the group has worked up a guide to good practice in the provision of passenger information, which was published by the Department in September. Copies of both documents have been placed in the Library.

Private Pilots' Licences

Mr. Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many holders of (i) a United Kingdom private pilot's licence for *(a)* helicopters PPL (h) and *(b)* fixed-wing aeroplanes, (ii) an airline transport licence and (iii) a commercial pilot's licence for (A) helicopters and (B) gyroplanes have been prosecuted for exceeding the privileges of their licence since 24 July 1990; [8833]

(2) how many alleged incidents of holders of (i) a private pilot's licence for *(a)* helicopters and *(b)* aeroplanes (ii) an airline transport licence and (iii) a commercial pilot's licence for (A) helicopters and (B) gyroplanes, exceeding the privileges of their licence have been investigated by investigating officers of the air safety enforcement section of the legal branch of the UK CAA since 24 July 1990. [8834]

Mr. Bowis: Records of prosecutions of pilots for exceeding the privileges of their licences do not specify what licences and/or ratings were held at the time, although they do distinguish between fixed-wing and helicopter incidents.

Since 1 January 1991, there have been 22 successful prosecutions of pilots for exceeding the privileges of their licences, 16 involving pilots of fixed-wing aircraft and six involving helicopter pilots. All earlier records have been archived and the information from these could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Records relating to investigations which do not lead to prosecutions are not retained.

Mr. Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many holders of a UK private pilot's licence and a UK private pilot's licence (helicopter) have been convicted for conducting public transport operations. [8835]

Mr. Bowis: Since 1 January 1991, there have been 18 successful prosecutions for illegal public transport operations, 12 involving fixed-wing aircraft and six involving helicopters. The records do no show the category of licence held by the pilots.

A5 (Weeford to Fazeley)

Mr. Brian David Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when and for what reasons the decision was taken to withdraw the scheme to improve the A5 from Weeford to Fazeley from the trunk road programme. [8821]

Mr. Watts: The A5 from Weeford to Fazeley was one of a number of longer—term schemes withdrawn from the programme following the Chancellor's Budget statement last November. These schemes had little chance of coming to fruition within a reasonable time scale and were withdrawn to remove uncertainty and the damaging effects of blight on individuals and neighbourhoods.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents have occurred in each of the last five years on the A5 between Weeford and Fazeley. [8820]

Mr. Watts: It is our policy to record only those accidents involving personal injury. The number of such accidents for the section of the A5 between Weeford and Fazeley, including the A5/A38 junction, for the last five years is as follows:

	Fatal	*Serious*	*Slight*	*Total*
1991	0	0	9	9
1992	1	3	12	16
1993	0	0	3	3
1994	1	1	6	8
1995	1	1	7	9
1996 (to June)	0	1	4	5
Total	3	6	41	50

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received *(a)* in support and *(b)* against the A5 Weeford to Fazeley improvement scheme; and if he will list them. [8824]

Mr. Watts: Some 90 per cent. of those members of the public who responded to the 1993 public consultation exercise supported an improvement to the A5 between Weeford and Fazeley.

Twelve official bodies were also consulted. The results were as follows:

Full support:

Staffordshire County Council
Borough of Tamworth
Countryside Commission
Cyclists Touring Club
RAC Motoring Services
Road Haulage Association
Weeford Parish Council

No objection in principle:

Linchfield City Council
National Rivers Authority
Staffordshire Police

Agreement in Principle:

Hints with Canwell Parish Council

Objection to the Scheme:

Council for the Protection of Rural Engand.

Mr. Jenkins: To the Secretary of State for Transport what is the traffic capacity of the A5 from Weeford to Fazeley; and what is the current volume. [8819]

Mr. Watts: The congestion reference flow, which shows the level at which the road would be in the peak periods on an average day, is approximately 20,000 vehicles per day for the A5 between Weeford and Fazeley.

The current traffic flow—1996—is some 16,000 vehicles per day, of which 20 per cent. are heavy goods vehicles.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to deal with the existing traffic problems on the A5 between the A38 junction and Fazeley. [8823]

Mr. Watts: Following the 1995 "Managing the Roads Programme" review, Staffordshire county council was commissioned to investigate what interim measures could be undertaken on that section of trunk road. Its report is expected the end of the year. With the scheme now withdrawn from the programme, we shall consider what measures, within current resources limitations, we can undertake to deal with existing traffic problems.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total expenditure in *(a)* design costs, *(b)* legal costs, *(c)* land and property acquisition and *(d)* other preparatory work for the A5 Weeford to Fazeley improvement scheme. [8822]

Mr. Watts: Total expenditure incurred to date amounts to £473,445. This comprises:

	£
(a) Design costs	349,562
(b) Legal costs	nil
(c) Land and Property acquisition	90,000
(d) Other preparatory work	33,883

Civilian Pilots

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what training is provided to pilots of civilian aircraft on what to do in the event of encountering unidentified craft which do not show up on radar. [9563]

Mr. Bowis: Matters relating to the training of civil aircrew are the responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority. I have asked the chairman of that authority to write to the hon. Member.

Ringway Airport

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the incident that occurred at 6.48 pm to flight 5061 on its descent into Ringway airport, Manchester on the night of 6 January 1995; and if he will make a statement. [9581]

Mr. Bowis: This incident was assessed by the joint airmiss working group, consisting of representatives from both civil and military aviation. The group found that both the degree of risk and the cause of the incident were unassessable. Full details are contained in joint airmiss working group report No. 1/95—January 1995 to April 1995, which is available from the Library.

Flight Operations Inspectors

Mr. Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what are the minimum professional qualifications for a person to be employed as a flight operations inspector (helicopters) in the flight operations inspectorate of the safety regulation group of the United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority; [8829]

(2) what are the professional qualifications and total helicopter and fixed-wing flying hours, of the most experienced flight operations inspector (helicopters) currently employed on flight operations inspectorate duties in the specialist helicopter section, FOI2, in the flight operations safety regulation group in the UK Civil Aviation Authority; and what were the equivalent data on 30 June 1990; [8830]

(3) what are the professional qualifications, and total helicopter and fixed-wing flying hours, of the least experienced flight operations inspector (helicopters) currently employed on flight operations inspector (helicopters) duties in FOI2; and what were the equivalent data on 30 June 1990; [8831]

(4) what are the average total flying hours, helicopter and fixed wing, of the flight operations inspector (helicopters) employed as flight operations inspectors in FOI2 in the safety regulation group of the UK Civil Aviation Authority. [8832]

Mr. Bowis: The minimum professional qualifications for a person to be employed as a flight operations inspector (helicopters) in the flight operations inspectorate of the Civil Aviation Authority is five years' experience in command of an appropriate helicopter and relevant experience in the UK industry. Inspectors are expected to retain a current airline transport pilot's licence (helicopters and gyroplanes).

While individual inspectors keep a record of their flying hours in their personal flying log book, a record is not kept by the CAA. The CAA could require such information from its inspectors under article 68(4) of the Air Navigation (No. 2) Order 1995 but there is a statutory prohibition on the disclosure of information obtained in this way.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the timetable for, and funding of, the proposed Birmingham northern relief road. [9771]

Mr. Watts: The 16-month public inquiry ended in October last year. Many complex issues were raised and it is necessarily taking time for the inspector to complete his report. Once it is received, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport will consider it and issue a decision as soon as possible.

The Birmingham northern relief road is the subject of a concession agreement with a private sector concessionaire, Midland Expressway Ltd., which is responsible for designing, building, financing and operating the road.

Channel Tunnel (Safety)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the quantity of *(a)* polystyrene products and *(b)* packaging currently being transported via the channel tunnel; and if he will make a statement. [9867]

Mr. Watts: No estimates of this kind have been made.

Road Closures (Commercial Vehicles)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many incidents during the past 12 months involving commercial vehicles which resulted in *(a)* total and *(b)* partial closures of (i) tunnels, (ii) bridges and (iii) motorways in England and Wales were notified to his Department; and how many prosecutions resulted. [9311]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Tony Banks, dated 18 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about how many incidents during the past 12 months involving commercial vehicles which resulted in (a) total and (b) partial closures of (i) tunnels, (ii) bridges and (iii) motorways in England were notified to this Department; and how many prosecutions resulted.

The Highways Agency is responsible for the management and operation of the motorway and trunk road network in England. There are occasions when the police will independently use their own powers to close a length of road because of an emergency. Where no damage to the road or roadside equipment is involved, and their impact is not great, these are unlikely to be reported to the Highways Agency. In view of this, I am unable to provide figures to cover all such incidents.

At the Blackwall Tunnel we have over recent years kept statistics of total closures and partial or short term (approximately 15 minutes) closures and prosecutions. In the last 12 months we have recorded 1 total closure (southbound 10/12/96), 430 partial/short term closures and 260 prosecutions. Most of these closures relate to over-height vehicles attempting to enter the northbound tunnel. On the rest of the trunk road network the Agency is aware of 20 total closures, and 86 partial closures involving commercial vehicles. No prosecutions have been recorded.

Transport Supplementary Grant

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of his Department's vulnerability to claims by highway authorities for damages if his allocations of transport supplementary grant were insufficient to enable highway authorities to meet their existing contractual financial commitments in relation to highway schemes approved for transport supplementary grant; [9448]

(2) if it is his policy that the transport supplementary grant allocations to highway authorities should be sufficient to meet authorities' existing contractual financial commitments in relation to highway schemes approved for transport supplementary grant. [9449]

Mr. Watts: When local highway authorities submit their annual transport policies and programme proposals, the Department looks scrupulously at the bids for support for schemes accepted for transport supplementary grant in past rounds. The aim is to determine the extent to which estimated expenditure is eligible for grant, is consistent with published guidance, and is in line with previous advice to the bidding authority on affordability. The Department makes it clear that TSG is not necessarily intended to cover the entire costs of an accepted scheme. There may be elements of expenditure in a contract that are not eligible for the grant. The Department is therefore under no obligation to provide sufficient resources for an authority to meet its contractual commitments. Subject to those qualifications, the Department none the less aims in making its allocations to avoid the authority having artificially to delay schemes that have already started construction. No case has been recorded in which an authority has pursued a claim against the Department because of alleged failure to provide sufficient resources.

Leaded Petrol Ban

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Environment regarding exemptions to the European leaded petrol ban; [9738]

(2) what discussions he has had with his European partners regarding the exemption for classic car owners from the leaded petrol ban. [9739]

Mr. Bowis: The Government endorse the need to sustain the continuing decline in leaded petrol sales but believe a total ban to be unnecessary. At the Environment Council on 15 October, my noble Friend the Lord Lindsay urged our European partners to adopt the UK approach of reducing sales through fiscal rather than regulatory means, thus allowing the owners of older or historic or classic vehicles to buy leaded petrol for as long as there is a market demand. Discussions are still at an early stage but there are signs that some of our European partners would share our approach.

Staff

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* non-permanent staff there have been in (i) his Department and (ii) executive agencies of his Department in each year since 1992. [9619]

Mr. Bowis: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as the information can be assembled and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Heavy Goods Vehicles (Road Tax)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the road tax charges for heavy goods vehicles in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* France, *(c)* Germany and *(d)* Belgium. [9129]

Mr. Bowis: In the United Kingdom, goods vehicles pay vehicle excise duty according to their revenue weight and their axle configuration. The following table summarises the main features of current rates after the Budget of 26 November 1996. In the Budget, the Chancellor also announced his intention to offer concessions to heavy goods vehicles with low emission levels meeting targets from 1988. Full details of rates are published by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency on form V149 "Rates of Vehicle Excise Duty" available at post offices.

Goods vehicle type	Revenue weight details	Current annual fee £
All types	Over 3,500 kgs not over 7,500 kgs	150
All types	Over 7,500 kgs not over 12,000 kgs	290
Rigid vehicles:		
2 axle	Minimun: Over 12,000 kgs not over 13,000 kgs	450
	Maximum: Over 1,500 kgs not over 17,000 kgs	1,280
3 axle	Minimum: Over 1,2000 kgs not over 17,000 kgs	470
	Maximum: Over 25,000 kgs not over 27,000 kgs	2,260
4 or more axle	Minimum: Over 12,000 kgs not over 21,000 kgs	340
	Maximum: Over 31,000 kgs not over 32,000 kgs	4,250
Articulated vehicles		
2 axle tractor	Minimum: Over 12,000 kgs not over 16,000 kgs	440
1 (or more) axle trailer	Maximum: Over 33,000 kgs not over 38,000 kgs	5,000
2 axle tractor	Minimum: Over 12,000 kgs not over 28,000 kgs	440
3 axle trailer	Maximum: Over 36,000 kgs not over 38,000 kgs	3,100
3 axle tractor	Minimum: Over 12,000 kgs not over 23,000 kgs	440
1 (or more) axle trailer	Maximum: Over 36,000 kgs not over 38,000 kgs	2,730
3 axle tractor	Minimum: Over 12,000 kgs not over 33,000 kgs	440
3 axle trailer	Maximum: Over 36,000 kgs not over 38,000 kgs	1,240

In France, goods vehicles not over 16 tonnes pay road tax as part of the graduated system that applies to ordinary motorcars. The tariff depends upon the power of the vehicle, its age and the area of the country or departement. Typically, vehicles in the lowest power bands pay FF200 to FF300, those in the highest power bands FF12,000 to FF14,000.

Vehicles with a total permissible weight in excess of 16 tonnes are exempted from this graduated tax, but instead pay axle tax. The tariff is based upon both axle configuration and gross weight, and ranges from FF200 to FF14,400 per year, although vehicles may qualify for certain reductions in these rates depending upon how they are used and operated. An articulated vehicle with two-axle tractor, two-axle trailer and weighing between 37,501 kg to 38,000 kg would pay FF5,200.

In Germany, taxes are based upon total permissible weight in kilogrammes. Standard rates for 1995 range from DM22 per 200 kg, for vehicles not over 2,000 kg, to DM124 per 200 kg for vehicles over 15,000 kg, up to a maximum of DM3,500. Vehicles meeting specified noise and pollution standards qualify for lower rates, which for the most environmentally friendly vehicles range from DM12.55 per 200 kg, for vehicles not over 2,000 kg, to DM30.85 per 200 kg for vehicles over 15,000 kg, up to a maximum of DM1,300. Trailers are surcharged according to total maximum weight, ranging from DM730 for those not exceeding 10 tonnes, to DM1,750 to those over 18 tonnes. Under those arrangements, a 38,000 kg articulated vehicle without environmental improvements would pay DM3,500.

In Belgium, vans, trucks, lorries and articulated goods vehicles pay road tax based upon the deadweight of the vehicle. The following rates were applicable between July 1995 and June 1996. Up to 1,000 kg deadweight, the basic charge is 150 Belgian francs per 100 kg, subject to a minimum tax of 888 Belgian francs. Over 1,000 kg deadweight, vehicles pay at a rate per 100 kg of 150 Belgian francs plus seven francs for every 100 kg over 1,000 kg, subject to a maximum rate of 346 francs per 100 kg.

At deadweight 4,650 kg tax payable is 15,916 Belgium francs. Over 4,640 kg, a supplement of 346 francs is payable for each additional 100 kg. Some vehicles may be subject to additional municipal taxes. A reduction of 25 per cent. is permitted to vehicles over five years of age. A 38-tonne articulated vehicle, assumed to have deadweight of approximately 13 tonnes, would pay roughly 46,500 francs.

Information Technology (Euro)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what tenders his Department has put out to convert its information technology systems to be euro-compliant; what are the cost and person hours required to convert the systems to handle the euro; and when he expects his Department's systems to be fully economic and monetary union compliant. [9455]

Mr. Bowis: The Department and agencies will need to assess the impact that a single currency would have on their information systems, whether or not the United Kingdom decides to participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union.

Coastguard Service

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what will be the proposed staffing arrangements at *(a)* Lerwick coastguard station and *(b)* Pentland coastguard station following the introduction of coastguard watch assistants; [8469]

(2) what were the recommended levels of staffing at *(a)* Lerwick coastguard station and *(b)* Pentland coastguard station on 1 December 1996; [8468]

(3) how many full-time and part-time coastguard officers, at each grade, were employed by HM Coastguard at *(a)* Lerwick and *(b)* Pentland on (i) 1 December 1990, (ii) 1 December 1995 and (iii) 1 December 1996. [8467]

Mr. Bowis *[holding answer 11 December 1996]:* I have asked the chief executive of the Coastguard agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. James Wallace, dated 18 December 1996:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions on staffing levels within the Coastguard Agency. The answers are as follows:

PQ 636/96/97

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many full-time and part-time coastguard officers, at each grade, were employed by HM Coastguard at (a) Lerwick and (b) Pentland on (i) 1 December 1990, (ii) 1 December 1995 and (iii) 1 December 1996.

	District controller	Station officer	Senior watch officer	Watch officer	Sector officer	Totals
1 December 1990						
Shetland	1	2	4	6	2	15
1 December 1990						
Pentland	1	2	[1]5	5	3	16
1 December 1995						
Shetland	1	2	4	8	2	17
1 December 1995						
Pentland	1	1	4	7	4	17
1 December 1996						
Shetland	1	2	4	6	2	15
1 December 1996						
Pentland	1	1	3	7	4	16

[1] One over complement due to overlapping transfer.

PQ 643/96/97

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what were the recommended levels of staffing at (a) Lerwick coastguard station and (b) Pentland coastguard station on 1 December 1996.

	District controller	Station officer	Senior watch officer	Watch officer	Sector officer	Totals
Shetland (Lerwick)	1	2	4	8	2	17
Pentland (Kirkwall)	1	2	4	8	4	19

PQ 637/96/97:

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what will be the proposed staffing arrangements at *(a)* Lerwick Coastguard station and *(b)* Pentland Coastguard station following the introduction of Coastguard watch assistants. [8469]

	District controller	Deputy district controller	Watch manager	Watch officer	Coastguard watch assistant	Sector manager	Totals
Shetland (Lerwick)	1	1	4	5	6	2	19
Pentland (Kirkwall)	1	1	4	5	6	3	20

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to pay a gratuity to those coastguard auxiliaries informed this year that their services were no longer required; and if he will list the numbers involved and lengths of service. [9577]

Mr. Bowis: The "focus for change" review recommended the replacement by permanent employees of the volunteer auxiliary service which supported Her Majesty's Coastguard's operations. There were approximately 360 auxiliary coastguards in the operations rooms with service varying between one and 20 years.

As volunteers they are not eligible to receive severance payments but we would like to put on record our appreciation of the valuable service given by operations rooms auxiliaries over many years. More than 3,000 auxiliaries will continue to form the coast rescue companies around the coast, preserving the long tradition of voluntary service to the seagoing community within Her Majesty's Coastguard.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the privatisation of the Coastguard agency. [9764]

Mr. Bowis: None.

Bull Bars

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what conclusions he has drawn from the Transport Research Laboratory's study of accidents involving bull bars; and if he will make a statement. [10279]

Mr. Bowis: The Transport Research Laboratory published yesterday a study of accident data which suggests that the number of additional deaths and injuries caused by bull bars is significantly lower than had previously been assumed. Nevertheless, we cannot accept unnecessary deaths on the road, even if in single figures. We are still very much opposed to the fitting of aggressive bull bars and strongly support current European efforts to control their use. We shall also be studying the TRL report carefully to assess what further action is appropriate.

A copy of the TRL study has been placed in the Library.

Vehicle Fuel Tax

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the impact of a 5 per cent. annual increase in tax on vehicular fuel on road traffic. [10205]

Mr. Bowis: The impact depends on the price charged at the pump and the number of years over which the increase is imposed.

North Sea Pollution

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many oil or chemical pollution incidents have been reported by each member state party to the Bonn agreement on pollution in the North sea in each year since it came into force; and if he will place in the Library copies of each submission made by the United Kingdom under the Bonn agreement. [8366]

Mr. Bowis: The Bonn agreement secretariat has informed the Department's marine pollution control unit that, between 1984 and 1996 to date, it received 36 pollution reports from contracting parties as in the table.

	1984	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1995	1996	Total
Belgium	1	1	1						1	2		6
Denmark	1									2		3
France				1	1							2
Germany						1					1	2
Netherlands		2	2	3	2	3					1	13
Norway						1		1				2
Sweden						1	1					2
United Kingdom					3	1			1			5

The secretariat has said that the Bonn agreement 1983, as amended by the decision of contracting parties of 22 September 1989, does not impose a formal duty on contracting parties to send copies of all pollution reports to the secretariat. In practice, all contracting parties resort to instant operational contacts with neighbouring parties from the start of an incident, often under the umbrella of bilateral arrangements.

Since 1989, the marine pollution control unit has notified the Bonn agreement secretariat on five occasions of oil pollution or threatened oil pollution in the UK as shown in the table. The Bonn agreement does not require members to make submissions. Of the five UK incidents listed, reports of two—the Philips Oklahoma and the Braer—are available in the Library.

Airline Ramp Checks

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those airlines identified by the Civil Aviation Authority as a cause for concern in relation to safety which has resulted in additional ramp checks being undertaken. [8441]

Mr. Bowis: Since January's announcement of a package of measures to increase the safety surveillance of foreign aircraft operating to the UK, the Department has asked the Civil Aviation Authority to carry out a number of ramp checks. Additional ramp checks have been necessary only in the case of Turkmenistan Airlines and Transarabian Air Transport. In neither case has there been evidence of on-going problems which suggest that these airlines are not operating in accordance with the International Civil Aviation Organisation's minimum standards.

Motorways and Trunk Roads

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each motorway and trunk road, in which parliamentary constituency each junction is located, based on *(a)* the present boundaries and *(b)* the new boundaries which come into effect from 1997. [9158]

Mr. Watts *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* The information in its entirety could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, I can provide a list of the motorway junctions in England based on the current parliamentary boundaries. As the list is extensive, I will send it separately to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy in the Library.

Iwade Queenborough Improvement Scheme

Sir Roger Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the draft orders for the Iwade to Queenborough improvement scheme, including the second crossing of the Swale; and what arrangements are being made for a public exhibition. [9587]

Mr. Watts: We intend to publish the draft orders for this scheme on 23 January 1997. This will be followed as soon as possible by a local public exhibition of the proposals. At the exhibition, officials will be in attendance to explain the proposals and to answer any questions.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Official Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for each of the Ministers in his Department how many official ministerial visits they have undertaken since 1 January; and how many of these have been abroad. [9377]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Ministers carry out many visits in the course of their official duties. During the period in question, the number of official visits overseas by Ministers of this Department were as follows:

my right hon. and learned Friend the Foreign Secretary made 46 overseas visits, visiting 44 countries;

the Minister for Overseas Development made 21 visits, visiting 26 countries;

the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), made 12 overseas visits, visiting 28 countries;

the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis), made 29 overseas visits, visiting 17 countries;

the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), made four overseas visits, visiting seven countries;

and I made 18 overseas visits, visiting 18 countries.

Intergovernmental Conference

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support within the intergovernmental conference the presidency's proposal for a new article 3d in respect of environmental protection and sustainable development. [9404]

Mr. David Davis: The Government support the objectives of environmental protection and sustainable development. There is already a treaty basis for EC environmental action. The Government are considering how this might be developed without extending Community competence or majority voting.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support the Irish proposal to strengthen the nuclear safety provisions of the Euratom treaty at the intergovernmental conference. [9406]

Mr. Davis: No. The proposal can be more appropriately dealt with in the context of wider international agreements in the nuclear area.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what environmental proposals the United Kingdom Government plan to put forward at the intergovernmental conference. [9408]

Mr. Davis: The Government are still considering what, if any, environmental proposals to put to the intergovernmental conference.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support within the intergovernmental conference the proposal that the Committee of the Regions should be allowed to bring actions before the Court of Justice for the purpose of protecting its own prerogatives. [9402]

Mr. Davis: The Committee of the Regions has a valuable role to play, but the Government do not agree that giving an advisory body of this kind direct access to the European Court of Justice would be appropriate.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the environmental issues in respect of which the United Kingdom Government will be supporting an extension of qualified majority voting at the intergovernmental conference. [9405]

Mr. Davis: None. As explained in the "Partnership of Nations" White Paper, at a time when there is serious public concern about the centralisation of decision making, the case has not been made for making it easier to override the objections of member states in matters of particular sensitivity. The Government therefore oppose the further extension of qualified majority voting.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the Danish proposals of 6 September to the intergovernmental conference concerning the environment. [9407]

Mr. Davis: The Government support effective environmental action at the European level which takes full account of the principle of subsidiarity. The Government do not, however, support the Danish suggestion that qualified majority voting should be used for decisions on environmental taxes.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support within the intergovernmental conference the proposal to amend article 3b in respect of the application of the principle of subsidiarity to regional and local levels. [9409]

Mr. Davis: No. As Heads of Government agreed in 1992 at the Birmingham European Council,

"It is for each Member State to decide how its powers should be exercised domestically".

Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for his Department *(a)* how many people in total are employed, *(b)* how many of the total number of staff are (i) male and (ii) female and *(c)* how many (I) men and (II) women are employed on a (1) full-time and (2) part-time basis. [9488]

Mr. Hanley: As of 1 April 1996, the Department was employing the following:

	Number
Total employees	7,200
Male	4,571
Female	2,629
Male full time	4,545
Female full time	2,483
Male part time	26
Female part time	146

These figures are for permanent staff only.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* non-permanent staff there have been in (i) his Department and (ii) executive agencies of his Department in each year since 1992. [9625]

Mr. Hanley: The answer is as follows:

	FCO (DIP.WING + ODA)	*Wilton Park (agency) (since 1991)*	*Natural Resources Institute (agency)*
1996			
Permanent	6,863	30	307
Non-permanent	97	0	16
1995			
Permanent	7,106	32	386
Non-permanent	99	0	27
1994			
Permanent	7,511	32	421
Non-permanent	81	0	14
1993			
Permanent	7,798	28	441
Non-permanent	61	0	38
1992			
Permanent	7,933	28	469
Non-permanent	54	0	29

EU Committee of the Regions

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support an extension of the list of areas about which the EU Committee of the Regions should be consulted. [9403]

Mr. David Davis: The Committee of the Regions is already consulted on a wide range of issues and is able to produce opinions on its own initiative on any other matters it considers appropriate. The Government do not believe that there is a need to expand its present role.

Legislation

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many items of legislation relating to his Department have been repealed

since January 1994; how many statutory instruments were introduced during the same period; and how many of the latter were *(a)* deregulatory and *(b)* fee orders. [9361]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given yesterday by my hon. Friend the Paymaster General, *Official Report*, column *492*.

European Council (Business)

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for January; and if he will list the major EU events for the next six months. [9865]

Mr. David Davis:

Monthly Forecast of Business for January 1997

The following Councils are scheduled:

January 7: Fisheries Council

January 20: General Affairs Council

January 20: Agriculture Council

January 21: General Affairs Council

January 21 Agriculture Council

January 27: ECOFIN Council

January 31: Transport Council (Informal)

The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

January 7: Fisheries Council

This Council will take place only if the December Council fails to agree on the following item:

Total allowable catches and quotas.

January 20–21: General Affairs Council

Agenda not yet available.

January 20-21: Agriculture Council

Identification and registration of bovine animals (possible item).

Durum wheat (possible item).

Honey (possible item).

Flax (possible item).

BSE (possible item).

Veterinary and phytosanitary equivalence agreement (possible item).

January 27: ECOFIN Council

Presentation of the Dutch presidency programme work

Programme of the Commission.

Structured dialogue with Ministers from central and eastern European countries and the Baltics.

Follow-up to the Dublin European Council:

Preparation of stage 3 of economic and monetary union;

Employment.

Sound and efficient Management—2000 (possible item).

Macrofinancial assistance to Ukraine (possible item).

Georgia, Armenia and Tadjikstan (possible item).

Renewal of European Investment bank lending envelopes (possible item).

Taxation (possible item).

Appointment of EC Jury for coin competition (possible item).

Other Business:

Lunch: With Minister of Finance of the CEECs and the Baltics;

Coffee: Briefing on intergovernmental conference

January 31: Transport Council (informal)

No formal agenda.

EUROPEAN CALENDAR: DECEMBER 1996–MAY 1997

THIS CALENDAR IS PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH EUROPEAN UNION MATTERS, BUT CERTAIN OTHER RELEVANT EVENTS ARE ALSO INCLUDED. EVENTS AND DATES QUOTED ARE BASED ON THE INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON THE DATE OF ISSUE.

	Venue	*Event*
January 1997		
1		Dutch presidency begins
7	Brussels	Fisheries Council
9–10	The Hague	Political Committee
13–17	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
20–21	Brussels	General Affairs Council
20–21	Brussels	Agriculture Council
23–25	Amsterdam	Conference on Social Policy
27	Brussels	ECOFIN Council (t.b.c.)
29–30	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
30–31	The Hague	Opening of "European Year Against Racism"
31	Amsterdam	Transport Council (Informal)
February 1997		
1	Amsterdam	Transport Council (Informal)
1–2	The Hague	Economic Affairs Council (Informal)
5–6	Noordwijk	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Informal)
6	Brussels	Political Committee
17	Brussels	Political Committee
17	Brussels	ECOFIN Council
17	Qatar	EU/GCC Conference
17–18	Brussels	Agriculture Council
17–21	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
24–25	Brussels	General Affairs Council
26	Brussels	EU/San José Conference
28	Amsterdam	Development Council (Informal)
March 1997		
1–2	Amsterdam	Development Council (Informal)
3	Amsterdam	Education Council (Informal)
3–4	Brussels	Environment Council
6	Brussels	Telecommunications Council
10	Brussels	Internal Market Council
10–14	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
11–12	Brussels	Transport Council
13	Brussels	Political Committee
14–15	Rotterdam	Social Affairs Council (Informal)
15–16	Apeldoorn	Gymnich (Informal)
17	Brussels	ECOFIN Council
17–19	Brussels	Agriculture Council
18–19	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
24–25	Brussels	General Affairs Council
25	Rome	Informal IGC Ministerial
April 1997		
4–6	Noordwijk	ECOFIN Council (Informal)
6–8	Maastricht	Culture Council (Informal)
7–8	Noordwijk	EU/Rio Group
7–10	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
9–11	The Hague	Social Integration Conference
10	Brussels	Political Committee
10	Luxembourg	Consumer Council
14–15	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
17	Luxembourg	Social Affairs Council
17–18	Maastricht	Ministerial Conference on EC aid to African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries post-Lomé IV
18–20	Amsterdam	Environment Council (Informal)
21–22	The Netherlands	Political Committee
21–22	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
23	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
24	Luxembourg	Industry Council
24–25	Luxembourg	African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries/EU Ministerial Conference

Information Technology (Euro)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what tenders his Department has put out to convert its information technology systems to be euro compliant; what are the cost and person hours required to convert the systems to handle the euro; and when he expects his Department's systems to be fully economic and monetary union compliant. [9463]

Mr. Boswell: The Department and its agencies will assess the impact which a single currency, assumed to be starting on 1 January 1999, would have on their information systems, whether or not the United Kingdom decides to participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union. Where possible, such assessment will be made when preparing information technology systems for the change of millennium.

Baby Milk (Labelling)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy on the labelling of baby milks with particular reference to the health risks of bottle feeding. [9736]

Mrs. Browning: The labelling of baby milks is controlled by the general requirements of the Food Labelling Regulations 1996 and more specifically by controls in the Infant Formula and Follow-on Formula Regulations 1995. The latter require that infant formula is labelled with a statement concerning the superiority of breast feeding, a statement recommending that the product should be used only on the advice of a health care professional, instructions for appropriate preparation and a statement warning against the hazards of inappropriate preparation.

The Government have at present no plans to change these requirements.

Organic Farming

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what new proposals he has to increase the acreage devoted to organic farming. [9705]

Mr. Boswell: The Government have introduced organic aid schemes throughout the United Kingdom to provide financial help to those converting to organic production. These will be kept under review. Last June, I was pleased to launch the organic conversion information service in England. The service offers a telephone "Helpline" and free advisory visits to farmers and has generated considerable interest; we hope that this will encourage more farmers to convert to organic production. Similar services are available in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Food Safety and Hygiene Prosecutions

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many successful prosecutions have been brought since 1990 for infringements of the food safety and food hygiene regulations. [9709]

Mr. Boswell: According to the statistical returns made to the Department by local authorities, the number of establishments convicted each year is as follows:

1991: 1,267
1992: 1,760
1993: 1,278
1994: 913
1995: 572.

No data are available for 1990.

Sheep Scab

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of public consultation on control of sheep scab. [10457]

Mrs. Browning: I am pleased to say there was a positive reaction to the Government's proposals for new legislation to help farmers control the spread of sheep scab, which were issued for consultation in December 1995.

Following comments, our original proposal making it a criminal offence to sell affected animals will be replaced with one to cover the movement of affected animals, except to slaughter. In addition, we propose to make the provisions to deal with sheep scab on commons more flexible. We will proceed with our plans to make failure to treat affected sheep a criminal offence.

We will now circulate our updated proposals, and invite further comments on the draft regulations which we are currently preparing. We expect the new legislation to come into effect in late spring or early summer 1997.

EU Agriculture Council

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 16 and 17 December. [10458]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I represented the United Kingdom at the Agriculture Council in Brussels on 17 December, accompanied by my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office. My permanent secretary represented the United Kingdom on 16 December.

I reported to the Agriculture Council the decision of the Government, which I had announced to this House on 16 December, to proceed with the selective cull of cattle at most risk of BSE. I also informed the Council of our progress in implementing the other conditions laid down in the Florence agreement and our intention to submit proposals for a certified herds scheme to the Commission early in the new year.

The Council reached agreement by qualified majority on a Commission proposal, brought forward at UK instigation, to amend the directive laying down minimum standards for the protection of calves. In the modified terms agreed by the Council, the amended directive will bring in significantly improved conditions for the housing of calves. Calves up to eight weeks old will have to be given enough space to turn round, and calves over eight weeks old will have to be housed in groups, with more space allowed as they grow in size. In addition, the Commission undertook to set rules requiring the inclusion

of a minimum of iron in calves' diet, and fibre for all calves over two weeks old. As to timing, the Council agreed that all new calf housing must conform with the revised rules with effect from January 1998, and that existing installations must meet the new rules by 31 December 2006. On the latter, I argued for a shorter transition period but received no support. This agreement will lead to significant improvements in the way veal calves are treated throughout the European Union. The proposals on which Italy voted against, and Spain abstained, will be formally adopted early in the new year.

The Council reached agreement on a number of other veterinary and plant health measures, including the conclusion by qualified majority—Finland voting against—of a veterinary agreement on trade between the European Union and New Zealand in live animals and animal products. The Council considered, but failed to agree on, a proposal banning the use of specified risk materials in the manufacture of animal feed and food stuffs. The Commission undertook to consider making further proposals in this area in the light of advice from the EU Scientific Veterinary Committee.

The United Kingdom welcomed the Commission's announcement of early proposals on the welfare of animals in transport, specifically in respect of staging points for animal journeys. The United Kingdom opposed proposals to modify the arable area payments scheme in ways which would have weakened the penalties falling on arable producers for excess production. In the beef sector, the Council held a wide-ranging discussion of the operation of the beef early marketing scheme and the calf processing scheme. The United Kingdom pressed the Commission to review the rates of aid payable under the latter so as to prevent undesirable distortion of the market.

Rendering Industry

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will decide on the final arrangements for financial support for the rendering industry in 1996–97. [10459]

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I announced in April that the Government would be providing temporary financial support to the rendering industry of up to £118 million this financial year. Since then, we have made payments of about £59 million on account pending final decisions on the form of this support. We have met our objective of ensuring through this support that the essential links in the meat supply chain are maintained.

I am now pleased to announce that the Government have finalised support arrangements for 1996–97. These take the form of a non-statutory scheme and follow detailed consultation with representatives of the rendering industry. I am placing in the Library of the House copies of the scheme and the agreement which companies receiving support will have to sign.

As with the payments on account support will be based on renderers' loss of income by comparison with 1995–96. However, support will be adjusted to take broad account of renderers' actual levels of throughput and costs this year. We have ensured in particular that the rendering industry does not receive support under this scheme in respect of material being processed under the over-30-month scheme. In devising the detailed arrangements we have sought to strike a fair balance between the interests of renderers' and the taxpayer and between different renderers.

Any differences between payments on account and entitlement under the scheme will be made up through adjustments to payments under the scheme. Depending on the level of sales income and throughput in the remainder of the year the final scheme is expected to cost the taxpayer in the region of £100 million to £110 million.

As a condition of receiving support rendering companies will continue to be required to maintain their prices and charges to their suppliers at the levels applying before 20 March 1996.

In order to assist them in devising support arrangements for the rendering industry, the Government engaged the services of Coopers and Lybrand. Its report to the Government on the rendering industry is being published and copies are being placed in the Library of the House.

We have announced that up to a further £59 million support to the disposal chain will be available in 1997–98, as slaughterers and renderers adjust to the changed value of animal by-products. We are now opening discussions with the industries about what form this support should take.

Intervention Board

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to publish the corporate plan 1996–97 to 2000-01 for the Intervention Board executive agency. [10455]

Mr. Baldry: I am pleased to advise that the corporate plan 1996 to 2000-01 has been published and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Common Fisheries Policy Review Group

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the Government will respond to the report of the common fisheries policy review group. [10456]

Mr. Baldry: The Government have carried out consultations on the report issued by the common fisheries policy review group in July. The results of the consultation have been taken into account in preparing the Government response, which is being placed in the Library today.

I am very grateful to the members of the group for all the work they put into preparing a thorough and wide-ranging document.

The group's overall conclusion was that the common fisheries policy has failings but that UK withdrawal would not address the fundamental problems facing the fishing industry. Where changes are needed, the CFP should therefore be improved from within. The Government agree with this approach as representing the only practicable way forward.

Forty specific recommendations are included in the group's report. The Government's response covers each of these in turn.

	Venue	Event
25	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
29–30	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
May 1997		
5	Brussels	General Affairs Council (t.b.c.)
6–7	Strasbourg	Council of Europe Ministerial
12	Brussels	ECOFIN Council
12–13	Brussels	Agriculture Council
12–13	Paris	WEU Ministerial
12–16	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
14–15	Brussels	Research Council
15	Brussels	Political Committee
20	Brussels	Internal Market Council
22	Brussels	Political Committee
25–27	Middelburg	Agriculture Council (Informal)
26	Brussels	Energy Council
27–28	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
28–29	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
29	Brussels	Telecommunications Council
June 1997		
2–3	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
5	Luxembourg	Health Council
5	Luxembourg	Development Council
8–10	Noordwijk	Environmental Planning Conference
9	Luxembourg	ECOFIN Council
9–10	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
9–13	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
10	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council (t.b.c.)
12	Luxembourg	Social Affairs Council
16–17	Amsterdam	European Council
17–18	Luxembourg	Transport Council
19	Brussels	Political Committee
19	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
23	Luxembourg	ECOFIN Council (t.b.c.)
23–24	Luxembourg	Environment Council
25–26	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
26	Luxembourg	Education Council
30	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
30	Luxembourg	Culture Council

Information Technology (Euro)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what tenders his Department has put out to convert its information technology systems to be euro compliant; what are the cost and person hours required to convert the systems to handle the euro; and when he expects his Department's systems to be fully economic and monetary union compliant. [9459]

Mr. Hanley: None. This Department's information systems already handle transactions in many currencies. Whether or not the United Kingdom participates in the third stage of EMU, we will modify them accordingly, within the appropriate time frame. The costs cannot yet be determined.

Bahrain

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will offer a financial contribution to the United Nations working group on arbitrary detentions to enable it to visit Bahrain to undertake investigations. [9734]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The working group on arbitrary detention has not requested a visit to Bahrain, but if such a request were made, we would expect it to be financed from within the working group's existing resources.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Bahrain concerning human rights; and if he will make a statement. [9713]

Mr. Jeremy Hanley: The Government deplore all abuses of human rights, wherever they take place. We have discussed human rights issues with the Government of Bahrain at ministerial and official levels on numerous occasions. During my visit to Bahrain in June 1996, I discussed human rights with the Amir, the Prime Minister and the Ministers of the Interior and Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government will make representations to the Government of Bahrain on the need to bring the Bahrain legal code into line with international judicial norms, with special reference to adding the right to appeal against death sentences. [9717]

Mr. Hanley: The Government of Bahrain are aware of our concern that, in accordance with international standards, those facing the death penalty should be guaranteed protection of certain rights, including the right of appeal to a court of higher jurisdiction. This is separate from any plea for clemency to the Amir which defendants may make.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of Bahrain concerning the detention of women and children and the need to observe the UN convention on the rights of children. [9716]

Mr. Hanley: I refer to my previous answer. Such discussions on human rights cover men, women and children.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Government of Bahrain regarding the death sentences passed by the Bahrain state security court on Ali Ahmad Abed Al-Usfur, Yusif Hussein Abd Al-Baqi and Ahmad Khalil Ibrahim Al-Katiab. [9718]

Mr. Hanley: Ali Ahmad Abed Al-Usfur, Yusif Hussein Abd Al-Baqi and Ahmad Khalil Ibrahim Al-Katiab have been convicted of burning to death seven Bangladeshi nationals. Provided international standards are complied with, the decision whether to maintain and implement the death penalty is a matter for each state. I refer the hon. Member to my previous reply.

Caribbean Dependent Territories

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for the future constitutional relationship between Her Majesty's Government and the five remaining Caribbean dependent territories; and if he will make a statement. [10297]

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: In the light of recent experience, the Government have examined actual or potential problems in the five Caribbean dependent territories. Considerable improvements are being made in the administration of the territories and their good government. However, it has become clear that some extension of those powers which may be exercised by Her Majesty's Government may be needed. We will take this into account in our continuing discussions with each of

the five Governments concerned and make any changes if and when necessary. We attach importance to our continuing friendship and close co-operation with the territories in the interests of their well-being and future prosperity.

Afghanistan

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the recent adoption by the European Union of a common position on the supply of arms to Afghanistan. [10338]

Dr. Liam Fox: On 17 December, following a British initiative in support of the UN's efforts to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan, the EU adopted a common position concerning the imposition of an embargo on arms, munitions and military equipment on Afghanistan. The embargo covers contracts entered into prior to the adoption of the embargo. The EU will also make efforts to encourage other countries to adopt a similar policy of restraint. In accordance with the EU embargo, Her Majesty's Government will not normally issue a licence for the export of any item listed in part III of schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, as amended—military, security and para-military goods and arms, ammunition and related material—often described as the military list, We will continue to consider on a case-by-case basis all export licence applications. From time to time, the contents of the military list may change, for example, to reflect technological advances or continuing international efforts to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

SCOTLAND

Budget Balance

14. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of Scotland's budget balance over the planning period. [8145]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None.

Health Board Finance

19. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairmen of the health boards in Scotland to discuss finance; and if he will make a statement. [8150]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend and I meet chairmen of health boards regularly to discuss matters of current interest, including finance.

Higher Education

20. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children gained entrance to higher education courses in *(a)* the current year, *(b)* 1987 and *(c)* 1979; and if he will make a statement. [8151]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The number of young Scots entering higher education has more than doubled since 1979. The age participation index, a measure of the number of under-21-year-old entrants as a proportion of the 17-year-old population, stood at 17.8 per cent in 1980–81, 20.5 per cent. in 1987–88 and 42.7 per cent. in 1994–95. Figures for later years are not yet available.

Ministerial Visit (Hawick)

21. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make an official visit to Hawick to discuss the economic and social regeneration of the town; and if he will make a statement. [8152]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has no plans at present to make such a visit.

Acute Hospitals (Glasgow)

24. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what additional resources he plans to make available to Greater Glasgow health board to meet the demands faced by acute hospitals during the winter period. [8155]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend announced on 9 December that an extra £15 million is being distributed to health boards this year in part to help reduce pressures likely to arise over the winter. Of this total, Greater Glasgow health board will receive £2,863,000.

Minister for Glasgow

25. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will appoint a Minister for Glasgow with responsibilities for regeneration policies. [8156]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I am responsible to my right hon. Friend for regeneration policies in Scotland.

Bellwin Scheme

26. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government with respect to triggering of the Bellwin scheme for exceptional weather conditions in the borders region during the winter of 1995–96; and if payments will be forthcoming from the scheme relating to the claims submitted by Scottish Borders council. [8157]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Bellwin scheme was triggered for severe weather during December 1995 and January 1996 on 4 August. Claims from councils throughout Scotland, including those submitted by the Scottish Borders council on behalf of the former councils, are currently being assessed for eligibility under the scheme and, where appropriate, payments under the scheme will be made as soon as possible.

Local Government Finance

28. **Mrs. Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss local government finance. [8160]

Mr. Kynoch: On 17 January.

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the 1997–98 grant-aided expenditure figures for each Scottish local authority. [10454]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The 1997–98 grant-aided expenditure figure for each local authority is set out in the table. Each authority's allocation of the GAE total has been determined having regard to the client group methodology which is agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in the distribution committee of the working party on local government finance. The allocation also takes account of the phasing out of the self-financed transitional mismatch scheme which COSLA proposed and I agreed to last year in the light of local government reorganisation.

The table excludes figures for the urban programme GAE which is not allocated to individual authorities. The addition of this amount—£56,894 million—brings the GAE total to the sum of £5,421 million which I announced on 26 November.

In addition to each authority's 1997–98 GAE, the table shows the change as compared with the 1996–97 assessment in both cash and percentage terms after adjusting for the phasing out of local government reorganisation costs and the transfer of responsibility for funding nursery education—and also relative 1997–98 GAEs per head of population.

	Total GAE 1997–98 £000s	*Increase from 1996–97 £000s*	*Percentage*	*GAE per head (indexed: 100 = lowest)*
Aberdeen City	196,479	–329	–0.17	100
Aberdeenshire	217,238	9,019	4.32	107
Angus	110,602	5,069	4.79	110
Argyll and Bute	104,691	897	0.86	128
Clackmannanshire	48,958	896	1.86	112
Dumfries and Galloway	155,190	3,132	2.06	117
Dundee City	164,884	631	0.38	122
East Ayrshire	128,665	3,103	2.47	117
East Dunbartonshire	106,022	4,266	4.18	106
East Lothian	82,715	3,576	4.51	105
East Renfrewshire	84,735	5,198	6.52	107
Edinburgh	416,537	20,594	5.19	104
Falkirk	136,550	4,348	3.28	107
Fife	346,740	8,108	2.39	110
Glasgow	767,967	–2,972	–0.38	138
Highland	234,363	4457	1.94	125
Inverclyde	99,605	869	0.88	125
Midlothian	79,656	1,012	1.28	111
Moray	87,808	1,210	1.39	112
North Ayrshire	145,461	5,566	3.97	116
North Lanarkshire	337,924	5,647	1.70	115
Orkney Islands	28,870	–287	–0.98	162
Perthshire and Kinross	128,962	4,608	3.70	108
Renfrewshire	184,227	4,278	2.37	115
Borders, Scottish	110,986	3,476	3.23	117
Shetland Islands	37,643	7,815	26.20	182
South Ayrshire	115,976	3,934	3.50	113
South Lanarkshire	311,049	7,643	2.51	113
Stirling	86,670	2,105	2.48	117
West Dunbartonshire	112,348	–411	–0.36	130
West Lothian	151,343	3,157	2.13	113
Western Isles	43,650	399	0.92	168
Scotland	5,364,513			

Forestry Commission Exports

29. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of state for Scotland what is the value of Forestry Commission exports; and what are its principal markets. [8161]

Mr. Kynoch: The Forestry Commission is not currently exporting any timber. It is the principal supplier to an expanding and world-competitive domestic wood processing industry.

Energy Efficiency

30. **Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what initiatives his Department has taken this year to promote energy efficiency in housing in Scotland. [8162]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 and the Energy Conservation Act 1996 were brought into effect in Scotland on 1 December 1996. Guidance on the legislation has been issued to all local authorities. In addition, the Scottish Office has published research reports on energy conservation and planning and the evaluation of energy efficiency initiatives.

Economic Co-operation (Northern Ireland)

31. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of state for Scotland if he will make a statement on the prospects for closer economic o-operation between Scotland and Northern Ireland. [8163]

Mr. Kynoch: There are no specific measures to encourage economic co-operation between the constituent parts of the United Kingdom. Businesses in all parts of the United Kingdom will continue to prosper as a result of the success of the Government's economic policies.

Electricity Interconnector

32. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss the impact of his decision on the proposed overland electricity transmission line in Ayrshire which forms part of the Northern Ireland–Scotland interconnector. [8164]

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has had no request for a meeting from STUC on this matter.

Social Work

33. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the financing of social work in Scotland. [8165]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The provision and financing of most social work is for local authorities to determine. Local authorities will have £1,010 million in grant-aided expenditure in 1997–98 for social work. This compares with £950 million in 1996–97 and £658 million in 1992–93.

Government Expenditure and Tax Revenues

34. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the central estimate of the extent by which total government expenditure in Scotland exceeded tax revenues raised in Scotland in 1994–95. [8166]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Excluding North sea revenues and privatisation proceeds, in 1994–5 Government expenditure in Scotland was estimated to be £8.2 billion higher than tax revenues raised in Scotland.

Structural Budget Deficit

35. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the extent to which Scotland has a structural budget deficit in the Government finances. [8167]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have received very few representations.

Trunk Road Improvements

36. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for trunk road improvements in the next three years for Dumfries and Galloway. [8168]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In addition to the final phase of the upgrading of the A74 to motorway standard, we will undertake a major project on the A75 at the Glen. A route action plan will be carried out on the A75 to identify and prepare a programme of further improvements along the route. On the A77, traffic management and calming measures are currently being prepared for Maybole, Kirkoswald, Lendalfoot, Ballantrae and Stranraer. On the A76, a variety of schemes to improve visibility, junctions and access will be carried out over the next three years, including further improvements at Enterkinfoot, and traffic-calming measures in Thornhill and Sanquhar.

Local Authority Borrowing

37. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the level of local authority borrowing in Scotland; and what is the equivalent borrowing in English local authorities. [8169]

Mr. Kynoch: At 31 March 1996, the total local authority loan debt outstanding was £9.7 billion. The comparable estimated figure for English local authorities was £37 billion.

Governance

38. **Mr. Richards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from business regarding the future governance of Scotland. [8170]

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The proposed tax-raising parliament has been denounced by the Scottish chambers of commerce, by the Institute of Directors, by the CBI Scotland and by 78 per cent. of Scotland's major companies surveyed by *Scottish Business Insider* magazine.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning a tax-raising Parliament for Scotland. [8158]

Mr. Forsyth: I have received many representation from throughout Scotland and England supporting the Government's commitment to the Union and expressing concern about the cost of a tartan tax-raising Scottish Parliament.

Geriatric Patients

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to increase the transfer of geriatric patients from hospitals to residential or nursing homes in the community. [8153]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is a matter of clinical judgment whether or not an elderly in-patient should be discharged to a nursing or residential care home.

Drift Netting

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet representatives of the fishing industry to discuss the subject of drift netting. [8154]

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: I have no plans at present to meet representatives of the fishing industry to discuss this matter. As my hon. Friend is aware, there is no drift netting for salmon in Scottish waters.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research his Department has carried out to identify the reasons for changes in the number of food poisoning cases in Scotland over the last 10 years; and what the results of this research have been. [7430]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Food poisoning is caused by a number of different agents including bacteria and a wide range of research projects have been funded by the Scottish Office over the last 10 years into specific causes of food poisoning such as E. coli 0157, campylobacter and listeria.

Details of projects funded are listed in the Scottish Office Department of Health's health bulletin and Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department's programme of commissioned research and development publication. Research grant holders are encouraged to disseminate research findings as appropriate.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he collates on the number of in-patients by health board of residence on waiting lists of *(a)* under one year and *(b)* one year and over, as at 30 September in each year from 1992 to 1996. [7997]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* Information on the number of patients with patients charter guarantees on in-patient waiting lists at 30 September 1994 to 1996 is set out in the following table. Information prior to 1994 was not collected in the form requested.

Patients with guarantees on in-patient waiting lists as at 30 September[1]

	1994		1995		1996[2]	
	Number waiting less than one year	Number waiting one year or over	Number waiting less than one year	Number waiting one year or over	Number waiting less than one year	Number waiting one year or over
Argyll and Clyde	4,655	405	4,020	201	4,027	28
Ayrshire and Arran	3,489	98	3,268	35	3,301	8
Borders	1,000	4	1,005	2	958	—
Dumfries and Galloway	1,962	68	1,351	29	1,137	—
Fife	3,403	130	3,024	7	3,034	14
Forth Valley	2,276	159	1,857	52	1,643	—
Grampian	4,122	158	4,243	33	4,418	—
Greater Glasgow	9,408	301	9,369	382	8,818	294
Highland	1,959	64	2,032	38	1,828	26
Lanarkshire	5,275	127	5,975	61	5,174	—
Lothian	7,327	29	6,591	1	117	—
Orkney	105	2	111	—	296	—
Shetland	161	1	189	—	296	—
Tayside	3,175	120	3,264	16	3,420	—
Western Isles	299	5	299	7	319	3
All areas	48,808	1,679	46,755	868	44,336	374

[1] Patients on in-patient waiting list, with guarantees as outlined in the Patient's Charter. All figures exclude patients waiting for treatment outwith Scotland. The all areas figures include patients resident outwith Scotland and those whose area of residence was not recorded.
[2] Provisional.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he collates on the numbers of out-patients by health board of residence on waiting lists of *(a)* less than nine weeks and *(b)* nine weeks and over, as at 30 September in each year from 1992 to 1996. [7998]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* There is no centrally held list of patients waiting for out-patient appointments. Information on the number of referrals where a patient waited less than nine weeks, or nine weeks or more, from the initial referral date by health board of residence is set out in the table.

Number of outpatient referrals who waited less than 9 weeks/more than 9 weeks as at 30 September

Health Board	1993		1994		1995		1996 (Provisional)	
	Waited less than nine weeks	Waited more than nine weeks	Waited less than nine weeks	Waited more than nine weeks	Waited less than nine weeks	Waited more than nine weeks	Waited less than nine weeks	Waited more than nine weeks
Argyll and Clyde	20,325	7,574	19,485	7,995	19,303	9,116	16,701	7,454
Ayrshire and Arran	15,013	6,811	16,918	6,394	15,851	4,712	13,236	4,262
Borders	4,403	1,301	4,786	1,061	4,528	1,214	4,664	1,610
Dumfries and Galloway	4,947	2,191	5,280	2,152	5,014	2,323	207	78
Fife	14,217	7,469	14,940	7,405	15,998	7,714	15,436	7,850
Forth Valley	11,002	3,763	10,965	4,241	11,148	4,141	8,919	3,097
Grampian	19,010	8,513	17,900	8,964	16,880	9,077	7,488	3,522
Greater Glasgow	44,528	19,866	39,930	17,381	42,242	22,271	40,170	20,858
Highland	7,923	2,957	8,455	2,780	8,928	2,523	8,795	3,114
Lanarkshire	24,539	9,885	24,006	9,796	24,822	10,770	22,746	9,751
Lothian	33,613	10,290	33,836	11,778	34,181	11,224	20,446	6,699
Orkney	688	48	666	41	611	59	8	8
Shetland	1,001	171	901	253	972	239	841	357
Tayside	21,300	5,420	21,401	7,140	22,850	7,559	21,721	8,494
Western Isles	1,190	251	1,259	508	1,410	301	1,009	455
Scotland	223,699	86,510	220,728	87,889	224,738	93,243	182,387	77,609

Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for his department *(a)* how many people in total are employed, *(b)* how many of the total number of staff are (i) male and (ii) female and *(c)* how many (I) men and (II) women are employed on a (1) full-time and (2) part-time basis. [9486]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The numbers of male and female full-time and part-time staff employed in the Scottish Office and it executive agencies at 1 April 1996 are shown in the table.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* non-permanent staff there have been in (i) his Department and (ii) executive agencies of his Department in each year since 1992. [9618]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The numbers of full-time and part-time permanent and casual staff employed each year since 1992 are shown in the tables.

All permanent staff employed in the Scottish Office and its executive agencies at 1 April 1996

Department	Male		Female		Total
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	
Scottish Office core	2,128	13	1,525	270	3,936
Historic Scotland	423	6	135	21	585
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	212	1	24	6	243
Scottish Agricultural Science Agency	73	—	52	15	140
Scottish Office Pensions Agency	93	—	71	11	175
Student Awards Agency for Scotland	55	—	66	4	125
Scottish Office total (excl SPS)	2,984	20	1,873	327	5,204
Scottish Prison Service	3,797	114	584	44	4,539

All permanent staff in post in the Scottish Office and its executive agencies at 1 April

Department	1992		1993		1994		1995		1996	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Scottish Office core	5,012	271	4,779	288	4,691	289	4,054	292	3,653	283
Historic Scotland	619	23	631	22	622	28	605	37	558	27
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	215	1	226	1	246	8	235	6	236	7
Scottish Agricultural Science Agency	135	7	137	10	132	12	136	11	125	15
Scottish Office Pensions Agency[1]	[2]—	[2]—	161	7	171	9	156	10	164	11
Student Awards Agency for Scotland[1]	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	133	4	121	4
Scottish Office total (excl SPS)	5,981	302	5,934	328	5,862	346	5,319	360	4857	347
Scottish Prison Service	4,208	41	4,596	58	4,464	141	4,166	139	4,381	158

[1] These agencies were only established during the period shown. Prior to their creation date their staffing was counted under the SO Core.
[2] Information not available.

All casual staff in post in the Scottish Office and its executive agencies at 1 April

Department	1992		1993		1994		1995		1996	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Scottish Office core	204	38	274	48	132	22	134	19	163	26
Historic Scotland	64	29	52	59	21	10	33	13	95	65
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	7	18	19	20	22	12
Scottish Agricultural Science Agency	7	[2]—	12	[2]—	8	[2]—	10	[2]—	2	1
Scottish Office Pensions Agency	[2]—	[2]—	6	[2]—	11	[2]—	23	[2]—	14	[2]—
Student Awards Agency for Scotland	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	10	1	5	[2]—
Scottish Office total (excl. SPS)	275	67	344	107	179	50	229	53	301	104
Scottish Prison Service[1]	8	[2]—	19	[2]—	14	[2]—	41	[2]—	[2]—	46

[1] 1992 data for the Scottish Prison Service is on a full-time equivalent basis. Thereafter it is on a headcount basis.
[2] Information not available.
[3] Nil return.

Shared Parenting

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many divorce settlements have made use of the provision for shared parenting in Scotland since 1 November. [9414]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Statistics on the number of divorce settlements involving shared parenting since 1 November are not available. Courts will make no order under part I of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 unless it is essential to do so, and what orders are made will be particular to the needs of each case. Raw data from the courts will therefore be of limited value. The Scottish Office will, however, evaluate the impact of the provisions of part I as part of a comprehensive research programme on the operation of the provisions of the whole Act.

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what guidelines have been produced on the use of shared parenting in divorce in Scotland in relation to the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. [9415]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No guidelines as such on the use of shared parenting on divorce in Scotland have been produced by the Scottish Office. The interpretation of part I of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 is for the courts.

Divorce Settlements

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what mechanism he has set up to monitor the effect of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 on divorce settlements in Scotland. [9411]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office is planning to evaluate the effect of part I of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. I intend to announce details of a research programme on the impact of the Act on children and their families early in the new year.

Hospital Admissions (Complications)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate *(a)* how many people and *(b)* the percentage of people who have been admitted to hospital as a direct result of complications after (i) surgery and (ii) medicinal treatment in Scotland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9641]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* The information requested is set out in the table.

Discharges of patients from Scottish hospitals with any diagnosis of (a) complications following surgery or (b) adverse effects of drugs, medicaments or biological substances 1991–95

Diagnosis	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Complications following surgery[1]					
Number	10,304	11,559	12,516	14,149	16,526
Percentage of all discharges	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.5
Adverse effects of drugs, medicaments or biological substances[2]					
Number	2,631	2,601	2,678	3,032	3,634
Percentage of all discharges	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3

[1] Surgical operation and other surgical procedures as the cause of abnormal reaction of patient, or of later complication, without mention of misadventure at the time of operation.

[2] Drugs, medicaments and biological substances causing adverse effects in therapeutic use. This includes the "correct drug properly administered" and excludes accidents in dosage or administration. The figures include cases where the initial treatment was not in hospital.

Electors

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of electors in each local authority area when the current electoral register was published on 16 February. [9399]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* The information is set out in the table.

	Parliamentary electorate	*Local Government electorate*
Scotland	3,963,072	3,971,203
Aberdeen City	171,619	172,841
Aberdeenshire	170,725	171,080
Angus	86,456	86,532
Argyll and Bute	69,462	69,594
Clackmannanshire	37,058	37,087
Dumfries and Galloway	116,639	116,815
Dundee City	116,054	116,290
East Ayrshire	94,936	94,983
East Dunbartonshire	84,194	84,268
East Lothian	69,171	69,242
East Renfrewshire	66,884	66,923
Edinburgh, City of	356,439	358,737
Falkirk	110,544	110,584
Fife	274,585	274,967
Glasgow, City of	469,791	470,878
Highland	162,890	163,154
Inverclyde	68,666	68,694
Midlothian	61,131	61,180
Moray	65,216	65,351
North Ayrshire	106,098	106,164
North Lanarkshire	246,114	246,223
Orkney Islands	15,652	15,678
Perth and Kinross	103,259	103,442
Renfrewshire	138,178	138,245
Scottish Borders	85,281	85,386
Shetland Islands	16,983	17,003
South Ayrshire	90,312	90,417
South Lanarkshire	234,593	234,800
Stirling	64,871	65,255
West Dunbartonshire	72,449	72,459
West Lothian	113,614	113,705
Western Isles	23,208	23,226

Prednisolone

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people *(a)* have been prescribed and *(b)* took the steroid Prednisolone in Scotland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9640]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* This information is not available in the form requested. It is not possible to identify the number of people who were prescribed or took Prednisolone. Data collected cover the number of prescription items dispensed in Scotland.

Non-custodial Penalties

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the introduction of stronger non-custodial penalties for convicted offenders. [8136]

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill introduces electronic tagging so that hooligans can be confined to their homes, or within a very restricted area, and disqualification from driving will be available for all offences.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the names of those who have been appointed to serve on the Criminal Cases Review Commission, indicating those from Northern Ireland. [8707]

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given today by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department, in response to a question from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence).

The member of the commission with knowledge and experience of the Northern Ireland criminal justice system is Mr. John Leckey, coroner for Belfast since 1992.

Vocational Qualifications

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the percentage change in the number of vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland between 1993–94 and 1994–95. [8713]

Mr. Ancram: Between 1993–94 and 1994–95, there was a decline of 15 per cent. in the number of all types of vocational awards—national vocational qualifications and general national vocational qualifications—made by the main awarding bodies to candidates in Northern Ireland.

As regards GNVQs only, however, there was an increase in the number of students in schools and colleges in Northern Ireland gaining full qualifications. The percentage increases from 1993–94 to 1994–95 were as follows:

Foundation level: 200

Intermediate level: 28

Advanced level: 316.

Royal Ulster Constabulary (Equal Opportunities)

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will ensure that the RUC includes sexual orientation within the scope of its equal opportunities policy. [8914]

Sir John Wheeler: There is currently a working party within the RUC considering the concept of sexual orientation and its implications for the force, in terms both of service delivery and human resource management.

Dundonald Training Centre

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the annual saving from the closure of Dundonald training centre; how many staff are employed at the centre; how many persons were trained in the centre in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [9276]

Mr. Ancram: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 18 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me, as Chief Executive of the Training & Employment Agency (T&EA), to reply to your question about the proposed closure of Dundonald Training Centre.

The closure of Dundonald Training Centre will result in estimated programme expenditure savings of £1.2 million in a full financial year. This saving will be offset by the cost of providing Jobskills training for young people at other training organisations which will be in the region of £500,000 per year.

At present, 40 staff are employed at Dundonald Training Centre. We will seek to avoid compulsory redundancies through re-deployment to other Agency Training Centres, voluntary premature retirement and natural wastage.

In each of the past three years the number of people who enrolled for training at Dundonald Training Centre was as follows:

Year	*Numbers of trainees*
1996–97	[1]328
1995–96	327
1994–95	304

[1] At 13 December 1996.

The Agency will ensure that all trainees currently at Dundonald Training Centre are allowed to complete their agreed period of training at the Centre. Following the closure of the Centre, trainees who, in accordance with their training programme, are placed with employers for their further training will be supervised by staff from other parts of the Agency's Training Centre network.

I hope you find this information useful.

Official Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for each of the Ministers in his Department how many official ministerial visits they have undertaken since 1 January ; and how many of these have been abroad. [9384]

Sir John Wheeler: Ministers have spent the following numbers of days out of the office, each of which may have involved more than one visit:

	Ministerial visits (days)	*Visits abroad (days)*
Sir P. Mayhew	45	5
Mr. M. Ancram	50	9
Sir J. Wheeler	55	9
Baroness Denton	156	43
Mr. M. Moss	101	4

Prednisolone

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people have *(a)* become crippled and *(b)* died from taking the steroid Prednisolone in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9603]

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:*

(a) The information requested is not available;

(b) There have been no deaths recorded in Northern Ireland from the use of the steroid Prednisolone during the last five years 1991 to 1995.

Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for his Department *(a)* how many people in total are employed, *(b)* how many of the total number of staff are (i) male and (ii) female and *(c)* how many (I) men and (II) women are employed on a (1) full-time and (2) part-time basis. [9510]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
(a) Total number of staff	27,264
(b)(i) Total number of male staff	14,816
(b)(ii) Total number of female staff	12,448
(c)(I)(1) Full-time male staff	14,744
(c)(I)(2) Part-time male staff	72
(c)(II)(1) Full-time female staff	10,414
(c)(II)(2) Part-time female staff	2,034

Notes

1. These figures show the position as at 29 October 1996.
2. Part-time and job-sharing staff count as full units.
3. Figures include information on the Northern Ireland Office, the six Departments of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and staff in the Police Authority for Northern Ireland (PANI) who are civil servants on secondment from the NICS.
4. Casual staff are not included.
5. Except for NICS staff seconded to PANI, staff currently on secondment outside the NICS are not included. The numbers involved, however, are small.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* non-permanent staff there have been in (i) his Department and (ii) executive agencies of his Department in each year since 1992. [9622]

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is to be found in the following table:

	NI Departments and NIO		*Executive agencies*	
		Non-permanent		*Non-permanent*
	Permanent	*(casuals)*	*Permanent*	*(casuals)*
1996	26,084	2,068	15,656	1,513
1995	26,504	1,531	8,646	890
1994	27,605	1,056	8,437	1,089
1993	28,926	968	8,785	461
1992	28,802	1,144	7,736	

1. The figures show the position at 1 October in each year.
2. The figures in (i) include the figures in (ii).
3. In (i), part-timers and job sharers count as half units. In (ii), part-timers and job sharers are counted as either half units or whole units, depending upon the source. Figures will differ depending upon the method of calculation.
4. Disaggregated figures for staff in executive agencies in 1992 are not available.
5. The figures include staff in the Northern Ireland Office and the six departments of the Northern Ireland civil service. Also included are staff on secondment from NICS to the Police Authority for Northern Ireland.
6. Except for NICS staff seconded to PANI, staff on secondment outside the NICS are not included. The numbers, however, are small.

Royal Ulster Constabulary (Suicides)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* RUC personnel and *(b)* RUC reservists have committed suicide in the last 25 years; and how many used legally held weapons. [9578]

Sir John Wheeler: During the period 1970 to 1996, 39 regular RUC officers and 16 full-time reserves committed suicide. A personal protection firearm was used as a means of committing suicide in 47 cases.

Civil Disturbances (Housing Vacated)

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many houses have been vacated as a result of civil disturbances this year; how many Housing Executive dwellings so vacated are still empty; and if he will make a statement. [9579]

Mr. Moss: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and its chief executive has advised me that information on vacant houses is not desegregated down to the level of reasons for vacancies. The number vacated due to civil disturbances is, therefore, not available. The chief executive has also advised me that approximately 100 Housing Executive dwellings are still vacant, as a result of civil disturbances.

Information Technology (Euro)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what tenders his Department as put out to convert its information technology systems to be euro-compliant; what are the cost and person hours required to convert the systems to handle the euro; and when he expects his Department's systems to be fully economic and monetary union compliant. [9457]

Sir John Wheeler: My Department and agencies will need to assess the impact which a single currency, assumed to be starting on 1 January 1999, would have on their information systems whether or not the United Kingdom decides to participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union.

Death Certificates

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy (i) to revise death certificate forms to include a space for national insurance number and (ii) for dates of death to be entered on birth certificates. [9615]

Sir John Wheeler: There are no plans to revise death and birth certificates in the manner described. Provision currently exists for information on deaths to be provided by the general register office to the Department of Social Security for the purpose of recording national insurance numbers. The inclusion of date of death on a birth certificate would be inconsistent with the statutory position of a birth certificate as an official extract of an original entry in the register book.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

The House Party (Board Game)

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Attorney-General what assessment his Department has made of the new board game The House Party; and what consideration it has given to prosecuting the manufacturers, distributors and financiers for incitement to experiment with illegal drugs and of minors to participate in homosexual acts. [9868]

The Attorney-General: I understand that the hon. Member is asking the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to investigate whether the distribution of the board game to which he refers discloses any criminal offence. It will be open to the police to request legal advice from the Crown Prosecution Service during the course of their inquiries. The question of prosecution cannot be considered until there has been a criminal investigation.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Relaunch Strategy

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the planned expenditure on the relaunch strategy in each of the next three years; and how many partnership projects run by local consortiums this will support. [8842]

Mr. Paice: The relaunch strategy will concentrate all relevant funding on tackling disaffection among young people. That includes mainstream education and training budgets, which have been increased over future years: the Government have allocated an extra £128 million over the next three years for work-based training for young people delivered by training and enterprise councils and further education funding has been increased by £40 million next year.

Partnership projects will make an important contribution to the formulation of the relaunch strategy and the Government are setting aside £10 million over the next three years to support them. Bids will be invited from local consortiums in spring 1997.

The number and pattern of projects to be funded will depend on the nature of the bids received but the aim is to support at least one in each of the 10 Government regions.

Construction Industry

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations she has received about the impact of the Budget on job levels in the construction industry. [9441]

Mr. Forth: None.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans she has to ensure that newly qualified teachers are able to identify and give appropriate teaching to children at risk of (i) specific learning difficulties and (ii) dyslexia. [9497]

Mr. Forth: There will be wide consultation on revised requirements for initial teacher training in the new year.

The existing criteria for courses of initial teacher training require that newly qualified teachers should have acquired the necessary foundation to develop the ability to identify and provide for special educational needs and specific learning difficulties.

Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will list for her Department *(a)* how many people in total are employed, *(b)* how many of the total number of staff are (i) male and (ii) female and *(c)* how many (I) men and (II) women are employed on a (1) full-time and (2) part-time basis. [9494]

Mr. Robin Squire: There are 5,022 people employed in the Department, including those employed in Government Offices. The numbers of male and female staff working full-time or part-time hours are shown in the table.

	Number
Men	
Full-time	2,310
Part-time	36
Total	2,346
Women	
Full-time	2,232
Part-time	444
Total	2,676

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* non-permanent staff there have been in (i) her Department and (ii) executive agencies of her Department in each year since 1992. [9629]

Mr. Squire: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave him on 25 November 1996, *Official Report*, column *15*.

Training Schemes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people after leaving the (1) action credit, (2) adult employment subsidy, (3) access to information technology, (4) adult training strategy, (5) business enterprise programme, (6) business enterprise training, (7) business growth training, (8) business start-up scheme, (9) back to work bonus, (10) community action, (11) career development loans, (12) compacts/education business partnerships/education initiatives/careers service partnerships, (13) community enterprise programme, (14) careers guidance review implementation, (15) community industry, (16) community programme, (17) careers service, (18) careers service strengthening, (19) direct training service, (20) employment action, (21) enterprise allowance scheme, (22) enterprise awareness in teacher education, (23) enterprise in higher education and (24) employer investment in people scheme, *(a)* went into employment and *(b)* went on to further schemes and became unemployed; how many started and how many finished each scheme, including those who left before completion of the scheme, in each year of each scheme's operation and what type and level of qualification each leaver obtained, for each year of the scheme's operation up to the latest available year for which data are available. [8630]

Mr. Paice: The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people after attending (1) training and enterprise council—TEC—schemes, (2) TEC challenge schemes, (3) temporary employment

subsidy, (4) training and education support, (5) training for enterprise, (6) training for work, (7) the travel to interview scheme, (8) the training opportunities programme, (9) the temporary short-time working compensation scheme, (10) the technical and vocational education initiative, (11) the voluntary projects programme, (12) the working experience programme, (13) workstart pilots, (14) the wider opportunities training programme, (15) work trial, (16) work wise, (17) the youth enterprise initiative, (18) the youth employment service, (19) youth employment subsidy, (20) the youth opportunities programme, (21) youth credits, (22) modern apprenticeships and accelerated modern apprenticeships, (23) the youth training scheme and (24) the young workers scheme, *(a)* went into employment and *(b)* went on to further schemes including those who left before completion of the scheme, in each year of each scheme's operation; and what type and level of qualification each leaver obtained, for each year of the scheme's operation up to the latest available year for which data are available. [9131]

Mr. Paice: The information requested can be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Information Technology (Euro)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what tenders her Department has put out to convert its information technology systems to be euro compliant; what are the cost and person hours required to convert the systems to handle the euro; and when she expects her Department's systems to be fully economic and monetary union compliant. [9461]

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department and agencies will need to assess the impact which a single currency, assumed to be starting on 1 January 1999, would have on their information systems, whether or not the United Kingdom decides to participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union.

Career Development Loans (Fraud)

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what police investigations are presently being conducted into cases of fraud concerning the granting of career development loans; what sums of money are involved; and if she will make a statement. [9706]

Mr. Paice: The police have been asked to investigate eight individual applications for career development loans which are suspected of being fraudulent. The total amount loaned by the banks on these eight cases is £103,204.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if she will introduce new safeguards to protect the career development loan scheme from fraudulent applications. [9707]

Mr. Paice: The career development loan scheme has stringent and effective fraud prevention measures built in. Currently, I have no plans to add to them.

Student Grants

Mr. Bryan Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many and what percentage of students in full-time higher education *(a)* received full maintenance grants and *(b)* received no maintenance grants at the latest date for which figures are available. [9749]

Mr. Forth: The Department has figures available for holders of mandatory awards only. In the academic year 1994–95, of 761,000 mandatory award holders, excluding placement year sandwich students, 344,300—45 per cent.—received full maintenance grants and 175,400—23 per cent.—received a nil maintenance grant.

European Union Programmes

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what European Union programmes are covered in the Europes adjustments to her Department's budget; what is the total amount involved in such adjustments; how that total is distributed between the Department's programmes; and how the individual programme adjustments are calculated for both 1996–97 and 1997–98. [9708]

Mr. Paice: Europes adjustments are made to the Department's budget in respect of European Union programmes in which the Department has a policy interest. These programmes are listed.

Total adjustments made to departmental budgets in 1996 were £53 million, £3 million and £4 million for 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000 respectively. Reductions are distributed between departmental programmes broadly in proportion to their shares of the Department's total programme budget, taking into account specific circumstances which apply to particular programmes. This method was followed by the former Department for Education and the former Employment Department in 1996–97, and by the Department for Education and Employment in 1997–98.

European Community Programmes covered in DfEE Europes adjustments

General Education Measures

Socrates

Co-operation with 3rd Countries: USA etc.

European Year of Lifelong Learning

Youth for Europe

European Volunteer Service

General Measures for Vocational training and Guidance

Leonardo

CEDEFOP European Centre for Development of Vocational Training

CEDEFOP relocation expenses

Integration in Universities (Jean Monnet)

Labour Market

Third System and Employment

EURES: European Employment Services

Measures—Equality between women and men

Customs Agents

Measures to assist the elderly

HELIOS: Integration of Disabled Persons

Measures to combat poverty

Measures to Assist Families

Free Movement and Migrants, including Immigrants

Refugees

Combating Racism

Dublin Foundation: European Foundation for Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Public Health

Health Aspects of Drug Abuse

Combating Drug Abuse

European Monitoring Centre—Drugs/Drug Addiction

Business Promotion (SMEs)

Telecoms Trans-European Network (TENs)

IDA Interchange of Data between Administrations

Joint Research Centre (JRC)

3rd Research and Development Framework

Telematics

Targeted Socio-Economic Research

Training and Mobility of Researchers.

Note:

In the majority of cases DfEE shares responsibility with other Government Departments in proportion to the scale of policy interest in each programme.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Utilities (Transport Schemes)

Mr. Battle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what consultations his Department has had concerning the regulations making utilities liable for 18 per cent. of the costs of diversionary works for major transport schemes. [9294]

Mr. Page: My Department has been in discussions with the Department of Transport, which has the main responsibility for the regulations in question, and these continue. Consultations have also taken place with the national joint utilities group.

Information Technology (Euro)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what tenders his Department has put out to convert its information technology systems to be euro compliant; what are the cost and person hours required to convert the systems to handle the euro; and when he expects his Department's systems to be fully economic and monetary union compliant. [9454]

Mr. John M. Taylor: My Department and agencies will need to assess the impact a single currency, assumed to be starting on 1 January 1999, would have on their information systems irrespective of whether the United Kingdom decides to participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union. The Department's finance and pay systems have been outsourced, and changes to them will be the responsibility of the service providers. Other systems for the most part use commercial packages, and vendors can be expected to offer appropriate enhancements when market requirements become clear.

Firearms

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many applications he has received for export licences in respect of weapons which will be prohibited under the Firearms (Amendment) Bill; and if he will make a statement. [8017]

Mr. Nelson: Firearms covered by the provisions of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill are included in headings ML1 and PL5018 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994. To disaggregate licences including firearms covered by the Bill from other export licences issued under these headings could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost. I can say, however, that 303 export licences rated under those headings were issued between 1 November and 6 December. Coincidentally, a further 303 export licence applications rated under those headings were under consideration at close of business on 6 December. There were no new open individual export licences covering such goods issued during the period. However, six dealer-to-dealer licences, valid for a period of three years, were issued to registered firearms dealers enabling them to trade with counterparts in EU countries.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those categories of weapon which will be prohibited under the Firearms (Amendment) Bill which *(a)* may and *(b)* may not be exported without a licence. [8018]

Mr. Nelson: All categories of weapons covered by the Firearms (Amendment) Bill are controlled under the Export of Goods (Control) Order and may not be exported without a valid export licence.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many licences have been granted for the export of firearms since the Firearms (Amendment) Bill was published; how many licence applications are currently under consideration; and what is his policy in respect of issuing such export licences. [5583]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 25 November 1996]:* Firearms covered by the provisions of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill are included in headings ML1 and PL5018 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994; 303 export licences rated under those headings were issued between 1 November and 6 December. Coincidentally, a further 303 export licence applications rated under those headings were under consideration at close of business on 6 December. There were no new open individual export licences covering such goods issued during the period. However, six dealer-to-dealer licences, valid for a period of three years, were issued to registered firearms dealers enabling them to trade with counterparts in EU countries.

Firearms and most military equipment require an export licence before export, and all applications for such licences are considered case by case. Careful consideration is given to the political and military implications of allowing individual consignments overseas. The Government pay particular attention to proposed exports of military goods to countries with poor human rights record, where such goods might be used for internal repression, and to countries or regions where the export of arms might contribute to destabilisation of the area. In all, eight strict criteria for allowing arms sales were agreed by Ministers at Luxembourg and Lisbon European Councils in June 1991 and June 1992.

Defence Exports (Bahrain)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all export licences that have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused for defence-related equipment bound for Bahrain. [9735]

Mr. Page: My ministerial colleagues and I meet the chairman of British Coal as necessary to discuss a range of issues. Officials in my Department remain in close touch with British Coal about the sale of British Coal Enterprise, which is a matter for British Coal.

Telephones

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his policy on households' access to a telephone for access to emergency services; and if he will make a statement. [8448]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Access to emergency services for all those on the telephone is guaranteed by licence conditions. The number of households with a telephone has risen substantially from 78 per cent. in 1984 to 92.4 per cent. in 1995–96. Conditions in licences authorising the provision of payphones require the provision of free access from payphones to the emergency services.

Riot Control Equipment

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what export licences have been granted for the export of *(a)* water cannons and *(b)* electro-shock batons to Indonesia in the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [2482]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 6 November 1996]:* Since 1991, when computerised records became readily available in respect of Indonesia, four individual export licences have been issued for water cannons. In addition to the export licence that was referred to in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on 9 December 1996, *Official Report*, column *30*, a licence for three water cannons was issued in 1994, and two further export licences, including three water cannons on each licence, were issued in 1995. In the same period, no individual export licences were issued in respect of electro-shock batons for Indonesia. To respond in respect of the earlier five years could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what trans-shipment licences the Government have granted for electro-shock batons since 1990; if he will list *(a)* the originating and *(b)* the recipient countries; and if he will make a statement. [2483]

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 6 November 1996]:* I apologise for not yet replying to the hon. Member. I will give a substantive answer in the new year.

Delphi Packard

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the Government office for the west midlands plans to reply to the letter sent by the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East regarding an inquiry into grants made to Delphi Packard on 8 November. [8453]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* I wrote to the hon. Member on Monday 16 December.

HEALTH

Consultancies

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the consultancies awarded by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the national health service executive and *(c)* the executive's regional offices in the last year. [8864]

Mr. Horam: The information is not held centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost to the national health service in 1995 of providing hospital treatment to patients suffering from food poisoning resulting from *(a)* salmonella, *(b)* campylobacter, *(c)* listeria, *(d)* E. coli 0157 and *(e)* other causes; and if he will make a statement. [9140]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many E. coli 0157 outbreaks there were in each year since 1990. [9437]

Mr. Horam: The information is as follows:

E. Coli 0157 outbreaks in England and Wales

Year	*Number of outbreaks*
1990	2
1991	5
1992	5
1993	8
1994	5
1995[1]	11
1996[1]	10

Source:
Public health laboratory service.
[1] Provisional.

Mr. Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have died from food poisoning in each year since 1990; and, in each case, what was the source of the infection. [9711]

Mr. Horam: Information on the number of people who have died from food poisoning is provided in the following table:

Deaths from food poisoning for England and Wales

Year	*Number of outbreaks*
1990	94
1991	82
1992	118
1993	109
1994	154
1995	203

Notes:
1. The data for 1990–92 represent registrations during the year.
2. The data for 1993 onwards represent occurrences during the year.
3. The introduction of a national case definition for food poisoning in 1992 may also have had the effect of increasing the range of infectious intestinal disease reported as food poisoning.
Information on the source of the infection for each case is not available.
Source:
Office for National Statistics—analysis of causes of death on death certificates.

Official Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each of the Ministers in her Department how many official ministerial visits they have undertaken since 1 January; and how many of these have been abroad. [9379]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is shown in the table:

	Total number of visits in UK	*Total number of visits abroad*
Secretary of State for Health	23	nil
Minister of State for Health Mr. Malone	58	3
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Mr. Horam	28	nil
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Mr. Bowis OBE/ Mr. Burns	51	nil
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State Baroness Cumberlege CBE	64	1

Staff

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for his Department *(a)* how many people in total are employed, *(b)* how many of the total number of staff are (i) male and (ii) female and *(c)* how many (I) men and (II) women are employed on a (1) full-time and (2) part-time basis. [9490]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is in the table.

1 December 1996

Total: 4,799			
Male: 2,119		*Female: 2,680*	
Full-time	*Part-time*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
2,094	25	2,415	265

On 1 April 1996 the national health service regional office staff became part of the Department of Health.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* non-permanent staff there have been in (i) his Department and (ii) executive agencies of his Department in each year since 1992. [9616]

Mr. Horam: The available information is set out in the table:

	Non-casual	*Casuals*[1]
1 April 1992		
Total DH	4,649	159
Executive agencies	412	30
1 April 1993		
Total DH	4,716	228
Executive agencies	889	68
1 April 1994		
Total DH	4,525	244
Executive agencies	954	65
1 April 1995		
Total DH	4,282	271
Executive agencies	985	66
1 April 1996[2]		
Total DH	4,588	271
Executive agencies	1,002	56

[1] Includes inward secondees and staff on fixed term appointments which can last up to a maximum of five years.

[2] On 1 April 1996 some 800 national health service regional office staff became part of the Department of Health.

Peanut Allergy

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the members of the expert group he is commissioning to report on peanut allergy. [9412]

Mr. Horam: Current membership of the peanut allergy working group, a sub-group of the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment, is as follows:

Members:

Professor H. F. Woods (Chair): Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield

Professor J. O Warner: School of Medicine, Child Health, University of Southampton

Professor S. Strobel: Institute of Child Health, London

Dr. I Kimber: Zeneca Central Toxicology Laboratory, Cheshire

Professor S. T. Holgate: School of Medicine, University of Southampton

Ms V. Shaw: Dietetics Department, Great Ormond Street Hospital, London.

Professor Caines

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the value for money provided by his Department's funding of Professor Caines' post at Nottingham. [9590]

Mr. Horam: The former Trent regional health authority and, from April 1996, the Trent regional office of the national health service executive have undertaken regular reviews with the centre for health services management at the university of Nottingham to ensure value for money from their funding.

People with Learning Difficulties

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring has been conducted by or on behalf of his Department on, the implementation of the provisions of the guidance issued in 1992 to health and local authorities on the provision of residential accommodation and support for people with learning difficulties; and if he will make a statement on its effectiveness. [9498]

Mr. Burns: Implementation of the guidance is being monitored in the usual way including through the work of the social services inspectorate, and statistical returns. As envisaged in the guidance, services for people with learning disabilities are becoming increasingly responsive to individual needs. There is to be an SSI inspection of learning disability services in 1997.

Mental Health Green Paper

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish his Green Paper on mental health. [9878]

Mr. Burns: We intend to publish the Green Paper in the new year.

Domiciliary Care

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are contributing towards the cost of domiciliary care as a result of local authority means tests; and how many liability orders have been issued by local authorities on properties owned by those receiving residential care. [9348]

Mr. Burns: The information requested is not available centrally.

Partnership Insurance Legislation

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the draft Bill on partnership insurance and long-term care. [9346]

Mr. Burns: My. right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced on 24 October 1996 that the Government would publish a draft Bill for consultation in the new year.

Care Service Charges

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assumptions he made about the income which social service departments would recover from charges for care services in the current year and in each of the past five years; and what estimate he has made of the number of people in receipt of such services in each year. [9347]

Mr. Burns: No such assumptions or estimates are made.

Free Eye Examinations

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost of restoring free eye examinations to all those over the age of *(a)* 65, *(b)* 60 and *(c)* 55 years. [9664]

Mr. Malone: Our estimates of the cost per annum are:

(a) £24 million

(b) £32 million

(c) £40 million.

Information Technology (Euro)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what tenders his Department has put out to convert its information technology systems to be euro compliant; what are the cost and person hours required to convert the systems to handle the euro; and when he expects his Department's systems to be fully economic and monetary union compliant. [9451]

Mr. Horam: The Department and its agencies will need to assess the impact which a single currency, assumed to be starting on 1 January 1999, would have on their information systems whether or not the United Kingdom decides to participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Ms Jowell: To ask the secretary of State for Health how many cases of MRSA have been recorded in England and Wales for each year since 1990. [9512]

Mr. Horam: Information on the total number of cases of infection or colonisation with methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus is not collected centrally. Information on the numbers of people affected by MRSA incidents since 1992 is set out in the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) on 3 December, *Official Report,* column *634.*

Ms. Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital beds have been closed because of MRSA for each year since 1990. [9513]

Mr. Horam: The information requested is not held centrally.

Political Activity

Ms. Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the political affiliation of those candidates appointed to public positions in the health service after July whose appointments fall within the guidance on declaration of political activity from the Commission for Public Appointments. [9511]

Mr. Malone: Work is currently under way on compiling the Department's second annual report of public appointments which will include information on the political activity of those appointed to serve on health bodies since April 1996.

Refugees

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total expenditure by his Department on refugee children by each local authority since April 1994 within the terms of the Children Act 1989. [9715]

Mr. Burns: The Department has established special grants for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and children in families for 1996–97. Under the conditions of both grants, allocations and payments will be made in 1997 to individual authorities who qualify for support. In previous years the Department has not made separate financial provision to local authorities for asylum-seeking children.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what meetings have been held with organisations representing refugees concerning the health needs of children and vulnerable adults. [9714]

Mr. Burns: Officials have held two meetings during 1996 with representatives of the Refugee Council to discuss the progress of a project which the department has funded with section 64 grants.

A third meeting was held this month to discuss the aims of a potential new bid from the Refugee Council for more section 64 money that will address the health needs of refugees.

Formaldehyde

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the carcinogenic properties of formaldehyde. [9567]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

The Health and Safety Executive on behalf of the Health and Safety Commission reviewed the health effects and occupational exposure of formaldehyde for the purpose of setting an occupational exposure limit in 1984.

In 1993, a study carried out for HSE by the Medical Research Council toxicology unit concluded that formaldehyde was not a carcinogen.

There are no on-going research projects into the carcinogenicity of formaldehyde.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the risk to human health from the inhalation of formaldehyde fumes. [9564]

Sir Paul Beresford: I have been asked to reply.

The Health and Safety Executive on behalf of the Health and Safety Commission reviewed the health effects and occupational exposure of formaldehyde in 1984. HSC'S advisory committee on toxic substances agreed that the inhalation of formaldehyde fumes causes severe irritation of the eyes and upper respiratory tract. However, there was no evidence that the inhalation of formaldehyde fumes causes occupational asthma and the evidence for causing nasal tumours was considered equivocal.

The Department commissioned the Medical Research Council institute for environment and health to review the available data on exposure to formaldehyde in typical UK homes and assess the likely impacts on the health of occupants. This assessment was published by the institute in May 1996; the conclusions on health effects of formaldehyde were:

1. The irritant effects reported in some of the US studies from the 1980s related to mobile homes and relatively high levels of formaldehyde exposure, and are not relevant to the current situation in the UK.
2. Chamber studies with normal adults or those with pre-existing asthma have not demonstrated any dysfunction to mean formaldehyde levels currently found in UK homes by the Building Research Establishment study (0.020–0.025 mg/m^3, 0.017–0.021 ppm) or even at levels several times higher.
3. Epidemiological studies have not demonstrated any increase in respiratory symptoms or lung function at estimated current levels of formaldehyde in UK homes. However, there is a suggestion of an increase in asthma and chronic bronchitis among children living in homes with formaldehyde levels above 0.07 mg/m^3 (0.06 ppm).
4. There is no evidence to suggest that current domestic exposures to formaldehyde in the UK pose a carcinogenic risk.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistics his Department has collated on the incidence of accidents involving the release of formaldehyde into the environment from industrial premises. [9566]

Mr. Clappison: I have been asked to reply.

The Environment Agency regulates a number of companies which emit formaldehyde to the environment under the integrated pollution control regime. The agency's chemical release inventory, which is available for public access, provides details of formaldehyde emissions. I have placed in the House Library a copy of relevant extracts from the inventory. These show total recorded releases—in tonnes—as follows:

	England	*Wales*
1994	194.700	93.880
1995	215.200	37.230

I understand from the Environment Agency that none of the recorded releases was the result of an accident.

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Disorder

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has had from the charity Miracles in relation to recognition of multiple chemical sensitivity disorder in the United Kingdom and other issues; what response he is making; what action he plans to take; and if he will make a statement. [9425]

Mr. Horam *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* One letter has been received from the charity Miracles regarding multiple chemical sensitivity disorder in the United Kingdom. We will be responding in due course.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Animal Rights Extremists

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his letter of 2 December, Ref. POD/96 2/1/85 PO 13428/96, when he plans to announce his response to the recommendation made by Lord Lloyd that actions of animal rights extremists should be treated as terrorism. [8369]

Mr. Howard: The Government intend to respond in the new year to Lord Lloyd's report of his inquiry into legislation against terrorism, including his recommendation concerning the actions of animal rights extremists.

Tagged Offenders

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, of the 48 offenders who have been sentenced to a curfew order and tagged after conviction for theft, how many were persistent shoplifters and how many were first offenders. [8631]

Mr. Sackville: Information is not yet available about the previous convictions of offenders who have only recently been given curfew orders. In the first full year of the trials, nobody sentenced to a curfew order for theft was a first offender.

Central records do not allow shoplifting to be distinguished from other offences of theft. As a result, it is not possible to say how many of those receiving curfew orders have been persistent shoplifters.

Television Licence Defaulters

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the correlation between statistics collected by his Department and those of the Lord Chancellor's Department concerning the number of people imprisoned for failure to pay fines imposed for the non-payment of television licences in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [8890]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* The statistics on the number of people imprisoned for failure to pay fines imposed for the non-payment of television licences are taken from the Prison Service receptions data. The latest figures were given in a reply to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), *Official Report*, columns *385–86*.

The Lord Chancellor's Department does not have a separate source for this information and has written correcting information previously supplied to certain hon. Members.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many television licence fine defaulters were imprisoned in 1995; what was the average sentence they served; and what are the equivalent figures for 1996. [9325]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, how many television licence fine defaulters were imprisoned in 1995, what was the average sentence they served and what are the equivalent figures for 1996.

Provisional information for January to October 1996 shows that 293 people were received into prison for defaulting on a fine after conviction for using a television without a licence. Information for 1995 is published in "Prison statistics England and Wales" (table 7.2 of the 1995 edition, Cm 3355, a copy of which is available in the library) and shows that 735 (500 males and 235 females) were received for this offence over the year. The average time served by fine defaulters is about one week.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average daily cost of imprisoning television licence fine defaulters in *(a)* 1996 and *(b)* 1995. [9324]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to respond to your recent Question about the average daily cost of imprisoning television licence fine defaulters in 1996 and 1995.

We do not calculate the cost of imprisonment for television licence defaulters separately from other offenders. The average cost per prisoner for the financial year 1995–96 was £24,233 (£66.4 per day). The average per prisoner for April to September 1996 was £63.5 per day, or £23,190 for a full year.

Prisons (Disabled Visitor Access)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which prisons have been adapted to enable visitors to have access with *(a)* a wheelchair and *(b)* physical disabilities not requiring a wheelchair; what adaptations have been made to the prisons; and if he will make a statement. [9125]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent question about which prisons have been adapted to enable visitors to have access with wheelchairs and other physical disabilities.

Facilities for disabled visitors have generally been provided as a result of local minor work and we do not therefore have comprehensive central records of modifications made to buildings for this purpose. A survey carried out in 1995, however, revealed that the attached list of establishments have facilities for disabled visitors.

Examples of the type of facilities provided include ramps, lifts, wide doors and specially adapted toilets. The establishments listed may have all or any of these.

Our standard briefing guides for new buildings provide for access ramps, lifts, toilets, and for circulation routes to be made suitable for the passage of wheelchairs. Wherever practical these guides are also taken into account when existing facilities are refurbished.

Acklington
Albany
Aldington
Ashwell
Askham Grange
Aylesbury
Bedford
Belmarsh
Birmingham
Blakenhurst
Blundeston
Bristol
Brixton
Brockhill
Bullingdon
Camp Hill
Canterbury
Cardiff
Channings Wood
Coldingley
Dartmoor
Deerbolt
Doncaster
Dorchester
Dover
Downview
Durham

East Sutton Park
Eastwood Park
Elmley
Erlestoke
Everthorpe
Featherstone
Feltham
Ford
Frankland
Full Sutton
Garth
Gloucester
Guys Marsh
Haslar
Haverigg
Hewell Grange
High Down
Highpoint
Hollesley Bay
Holloway
Hull
Huntercombe
Kingston
Kirkham
Kirklevington
Lancaster Farms
Latchmere House
Leeds
Lewes
Leyhill
Lindholme
Littlehey
Low Newton
Maidstone
Manchester
Moorland
Morton Hall
The Mount
New Hall
North Sea Camp
Norwich
Onley
Pentonville
Portland
Preston
Ranby
Reading
Send
Shepton Mallet
Shrewsbury
Stafford
Standford Hill
Stocken
Styal
Sudbury
Swaleside
Swansea
Thorn Cross
Usk and Prescoed
Whitemoor
Wakefield
Wandsworth
Wayland
Wealstun
Wellingborough
Werrington
Wetherby
Whatton
Whitemoor
Winchester
Woodhill
Wormwood Scrubs.

Prisoners (Learning Disabilities)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the current Prison Service policy with regard to prisoners identified as having learning disabilities and dyslexia; and if he will make a statement; [9127]

(2) how many prisoners have been identified as having *(a)* a learning disability and *(b)* dyslexia on the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [9126]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your two recent Questions about prisoners with learning disabilities and dyslexia.

The policy of the Prisons Board towards prisoners who have any learning disabilities, including dyslexia, is that those who need to improve basic literacy and are prepared to attend education classes will be given every opportunity to do so. Contractors providing education to prisons are required to offer a basic skills screening test in numeracy and literacy to all prisoners. Basic literacy is included in the Prison Service's core education curriculum. A number of prisons are also trying to find better ways of giving basic skills training as part of vocational training and in the course of daily work in prison workshops. This work is being supported by the Basic Skills Agency, with whom the Prison Service works closely. The Unit has contracted Amersham and Wycombe College to provide a national support project to this end.

The number of prisoners identified by the Basic Skills Screening test as having a learning disability is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Crime Victims (Young People)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the number of young people who were victims of crime in each of the last 17 years and of that number relative to the number of adult victims for each category of crime; and if he will make a statement; [9100]

(2) what estimate he has made of the percentage of young people who have been victims of violent crime; and if he will make a statement. [9095]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* Information on the age of victims of crime recorded by the police is not routinely collected by the Home Office. However, information from an ad hoc survey on violent crime shows the rates of recorded offences per 100,000 population by age and sex of victims for each of the violent crime offence categories. This information is published in table 2 of the Home Office statistical findings 1/96 "Victims of Violent Crime Recorded by the Police, 1990–94". A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

No estimate has been made of the percentage of young people who have been victims of overall violent crime. However, information from the youth life styles survey carried out by the Home Office in 1993, based on a sample of around 1,700 young people aged between 14 and 25, found that 17 per cent. of young people in this age group reported being a victim of a "violent act" in the previous 12 months. The term "violent act" is not the same as "violent crime". The youth life styles survey defined a "violent act" as being where the victim was

"deliberately hit or kicked or had force used against them".

Sexual offences are not included.

Police (Secure Transport)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the cost to public funds of *(a)* arrested but unconvicted persons by the Metropolitan police in relation to court proceedings, *(b)* costs incurred by (i) the Metropolitan police and (ii) the Home Office for secure transport of those convicted and *(c)* the total costs of transport for the years (1) 1994–95 and (2) 1995–96, indicating the number of specialist vehicles and persons used by the providers in each year. [8808]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* The cost to public funds of arrested but unconvicted persons by the Metropolitan police in relation to court proceedings is not available in the form requested.

Costs incurred by (i) the Metropolitan police and (ii) the Home Office for secure transport of those convicted are as follows:

	1994–95	*1995–96*
Total cost to the Metropolitan police	£3.9 million	£1.4 million
Recovery from the Home Office	£1.5 million	£0.8 million
Net cost to Metropolitan police	£2.4 million	£0.6 million
Cost to the Metropolitan police of vehicles (included in costs above)	£505 thousand	£127 thousand
Costs to Home Office of vehicles (included in costs above)	£426 thousand	£235 thousand
Number of vehicles	52	30
Number of staff	77	26

The costs do not include the costs of special escort duties provided by the Metropolitan police or the Home Office in the conveyance of prisoners between Crown court and prison.

In the years 1994–95 and 1995–96 the responsibility for the escort of prisoners in London, other than those in the highest security category, to and from court was in the process of being transferred from the police and the Prison Service to Securicor Custodial Services. This exercise was only completed in July 1995.

The contract covers the full escort service, together with the responsibility for the custody of prisoners while at court. It is on a fixed-price basis and the component elements, such as transportation, are not costed separately. The requested information is not, therefore, available.

In 1995–96, Securicor employed approximately 900 staff and 150 specialist vehicles on the contract. The total value is approximately £96 million over five years.

Young Offenders

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 15-year-olds were being held in each young offender institution and remand centre, on the latest date for which figures are available; what percentage were held on (i) remand and (ii) under sentence; and if he will make a statement. [9124]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many 15 year olds were being held in each young offender institution and remand centre, on the latest date for which figures are available and what percentage were held on remand and under sentence.

The information requested for 31 October 1996 is shown in the attached table. 31 per cent. of the 15 year olds were on remand, with 69 per cent held under sentence.

15 year olds held in prison in England and Wales on 31 October 1996 by establishment

Establishment	*Remand*	*Sentenced*
Aylesbury	—	2
Brinsford	14	5
Bullwood Hall	—	2
Cardiff	2	—
Deerbolt	1	20
Doncaster	7	4
Exeter	1	—
Feltham	16	42
Glen Parva	20	3
Hindley	1	6
Hollesley Bay	—	1
Hull	4	—
Huntercombe	—	1
Lancaster Farms	—	2
Low Newton	9	2
Moorland	—	1
New Hall	—	1
Northallerton	3	—
Onley	—	16
Portland	—	14
Stoke Heath	—	15
Styal	—	2

15 year olds held in prison in England and Wales on 31 October 1996 by establishment

Establishment	Remand	Sentenced
Swansea	—	1
Thorn Cross	—	4
Weatherby	—	11
Warrington	—	17
Total	78	172

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which prisons and young offender institutions in England and Wales were holding girls aged *(a)* 16, *(b)* 17 and *(c)* 18 years old on the latest date for which figures are available broken down by institution and age; and if he will make a statement. [9084]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, which prisons and young offender institutions in England and Wales were holding girls aged 16, 17 and 18 years of age.

The information requested for 31 October 1996 is given in the attached table.

Institution	Aged 16	Aged 17	Aged 18
Askham Grange	—	2	5
Brockhill	—	1	2
Bullwood Hall	5	6	10
Drake Hall	2	3	9
East Sutton Park	—	—	1
Holloway	2	9	7
Low Newton	—	3	2
Newhall	1	7	18
Risley	—	4	8
Styal	3	9	9
Total	13	44	71

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women aged *(a)* 16, *(b)* 17 and *(c)* 18 years were received into Prison Service custody in each year from 1990 and in 1996 to date; and if he will make a statement. [9085]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many women aged 16, 17 and 18 years were received into Prison Service custody in each year from 1990 and in 1996 to date.

The available information is published in successive volumes of "Prison statistics, England and Wales". Table 3.10 of the 1995 edition, Cm 3355 and tables 3.9 for years 1992 and 1993. Information for years 1990 and 1991 only relates to sentenced inmates. Copies of these publications are available in the library. Provisional information for 1996 is given in the attached table.

Receptions of females aged 16, 17 and 18 years into prisons in England and Wales, January to October 1996[1] [2]

	Age		
Custody type	16	17	18
Untried	2	124	133
Convicted unsentenced	4	58	73
Sentenced	52	83	124

[1] Provisional figures.

[2] Total receptions cannot be calculated by adding together receptions in each category because there is double counting.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juvenile offenders were imprisoned in each of the last five years; and what was the average length of juvenile sentence for each year; and if he will make a statement. [9090]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about juvenile offenders.

The information requested is given in Tables 3.1 and 3.16 of the annual publication 'Prison statistics England and Wales'; the latest edition for 1995 has the reference CM3355. A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

The information for prisoners aged under 18 is set out in the attached table.

	Sentenced receptions Males		Prisoners aged under 18 Females	
Year	Number	Average sentence length (months)	Number	Average Sentence length (months)
1991	3,621	6.5	97	7.5
1992	3,344	9.2	79	8.1
1993	3,564	8.6	102	6.9
1994	3,971	8.5	149	8.2
1995	4,505	9.6	166	10.0

Includes some 14 year olds until 1992.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inmates of young offender institutions have *(a)* committed suicide, *(b)* attempted suicide and *(c)* been victims of violence, in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [9093]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about incidents involving young offenders.

The information on self inflicted deaths, attempted suicides and assaults is given in the attached table. Information held centrally on assaults relates to the number of adjudications where an inmate has been found guilty of an assault upon another inmate.

Incidents occurring in young offender institutions: 1991–1996

	Self inflicted deaths	*Attempted suicide*	*Assaults (proved at adjudication)*
1991	4	111	642
1992	5	119	691
1993	2	123	651
1994	7	102	711
1995	5	87	801
1996 (to 13 December 1996)	3	108	879

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young men aged under 21 years have committed suicide or attempted suicide while awaiting trail on remand in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [9094]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about young men under the age of 21 on remand who have committed or attempted suicide in the last ten years.

The information routinely collected from establishments about attempted suicides is not categorised by age and status of the prisoner and the details requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Further work is planned which will improve the level of detail available in coming years. The attached table lists the numbers of self-inflicted deaths amongst men under 21 during the last ten years whilst awaiting trail on remand.

Year	*Number of self inflicted deaths*
1987	4
1988	9
1989	11
1990	10
1991	5
1992	6
1993	3
1994	10
1995	9
1996 (to 13 December 1996)	6

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people under the age of 21 years were in prison or other custody in *(a)* London and *(b)* England and Wales on 1 November in each of the last 17 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [9097]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking, how many young people under the age of 21 years were in prison or other custody in (a) London and (b) England and Wales on 1 November in each of the last 17 years for which figures are available.

The information for persons under the age of 21 held in Prison Service establishments, including all young offender institutions is given in the attached table.

Population of persons aged under 21 years[1] in prisons in London and England and Wales on 31 October 1980 to 1996.

On 31 October	*London prisons*	*England and Wales*	*Total prison population aged under 21*
1980	405	11,140	11,545
1981	233	12,956	13,189
1982	225	12,872	13,097
1983	263	12,527	12,790
1984	291	12,054	12,345
1985	246	12,426	12,672
1986	351	12,039	12,390
1987	458	11,334	11,792
1988	932	10,091	11,023
1989	788	9,374	10,162
1990	903	8,134	9,037
1991	865	7,862	8,727
1992	680	6,782	7,462
1993	837	7,590	8,427
1994	887	7,594	8,481
1995	911	7,876	8,787
1996	977	9,384	10,361

[1] Includes some young offenders aged 21 years.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young people aged between 10 and 17 years were sent to adult prisons or remand centres to await trial in *(a)* London and *(b)* England and Wales during each of the past 17 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [9098]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question, asking, how many young people aged between 10 and 17 years were sent to adult prisons or remand centres to await trial in (a) London and (b) England and Wales during each of the last 17 years for which figures are available.

The available information on the number of untried prisoners aged between 14 and 17 years is given in the attached table.

Receptions of untried prisoners aged under 18 years into Prison Service establishments in London and England and Wales, 1992 to 1996

Year	*London prisons*	*England and Wales*
Adult prisons and remand centres		
1992	775	3,699
1993	740	4,049
1994	842	4,353
1995	933	4,413
January to October 1996[1]	836	4,059

[1] Provisional figures.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were reoffending rates for young people leaving custody in each of the last 17 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [9099]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* The available information relates to reconviction rates within two years for standard list offences and is given in the table.

Reconviction rates are affected by differences in the age, sex, previous convictions and other characteristics of offenders receiving the sentences, as described in Home Office research study No. 136, "Explaining reconviction rates: a critical analysis".

The rates prior to 1984 discharges have been derived from information contained in "Prison Statistics England and Wales, 1986", Cm 210. The information from 1984 onwards on rates for male young offenders is contained in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales, 1994", Cm 3087.

Percentage of sentenced young offenders discharged from custody who are reconvicted within two years of discharge by year of discharge

	Males	*Females*	*Total*
1976[1]	67	49	67
1977[1]	69	48	68
1978[1]	65	54	65
1979[1]	66	47	65
1980	69	45	68
1981	66	46	66
1982	68	47	67
1983	67	44	67
1984	65	42	65
1985	64	44	64
1986	63	46	62
1987[2]	72	52	71
1988[2]	70	55	70
1989[2]	71	57	71
1990[2]	72	59	72
1991[2]	72	52	72

Percentage of sentenced young offenders discharged from custody who are reconvicted within two years of discharge by year of discharge

	Males	*Females*	*Total*
1992[2]	72	51	71

[1] Rates for those discharged from custody only relate to those released from Detention Centres or Borstal Training.
[2] Figures for 1987 and after are not directly comparable with those for earlier years due to a change in methodology. If the old methodology had been followed it is estimated that the reconviction rates would be about 7 to 8 percentage points lower for the males and 5 to 6 percentage points for the females. This change is described in paragraphs 21 and 22 on page 6 of Prison Statistics, England and Wales, 1994 (Cm 3087).

Police Manpower

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the manpower of each police force in respect of *(a)* number of police officers and *(b)* number of civilian support staff on 1 November for each of the last five years for which figures are available. [8809]

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* Information on police strength was collected at the end of each month until April 1995. Data on police service strength are now collected twice a year, March and September. Information for the last five years is in the table.

Between October 1992 and September 1996, the total number of constables in England and Wales increased by 1,692 to 98,017. This is a record high number of constables.

Police officer and civilian strength 1992 to 1996

Force	*31 October 1992*[1]		*31 October 1993*[1]		*31 October 1994*[1]		*30 September 1995*[1]		*30 September 1996*[1]	
	Police	*Civilians*	*Police*	*Civilians*	*Police*	*Civilians*	*Police*	*Civilians*	*Police*	*Civilians*
Avon and Somerset	3,068	1,254	3,048	1,338	3,025	1,325	2,986	1,294	3,004	1,315
Bedfordshire	1,129	420	1,157	439	1,123	477	1,116	519	1,118	528
Cambridgeshire	1,262	491	1,278	488	1,270	488	1,254	546	1,253	597
Cheshire	1,888	581	1,858	615	1,913	641	1,951	730	2,016	791
City of London	801	378	878	384	889	332	869	338	868	335
Cleveland	1,490	491	1,430	521	1,442	525	1,430	575	1,444	623
Cumbria	1,192	446	1,205	459	1,179	484	1,144	462	1,124	457
Derbyshire	1,803	635	1,786	657	1,803	670	1,762	751	1,795	737
Devon and Cornwall	2,918	1,182	2,917	1,213	2,885	1,224	2,872	1,237	2,876	1,283
Dorset	1,317	630	1,302	625	1,287	665	1,272	671	1,262	678
Durham	1,390	563	1,379	560	1,357	508	1,377	526	1,426	563
Dyfed Powys	966	287	968	304	980	311	977	335	998	354
Essex	2,963	1,200	2,964	1,279	2,909	1,329	2,897	1,270	2,927	1,400
Gloucestershire	1,154	411	1,144	420	1,171	425	1,142	464	1,139	460
Greater Manchester	7,084	2,693	7,075	2,815	6,980	2,880	7,026	2,904	6,961	2,922
Gwent	1,008	346	996	350	1,004	350	1,006	380	1,231	497
Hampshire	3,269	1,169	3,272	1,212	3,259	1,317	3,307	1,409	3,362	1,429
Hertfordshire	1,690	665	1,693	669	1,691	699	1,704	921	1,721	863
Humberside	2,027	760	2,029	733	2,038	708	2,025	670	2,042	772
Kent	3,099	1,230	3,183	1,228	3,137	1,181	3,100	1,290	3,227	1,332
Lancashire	3,203	1,190	3,149	1,164	3,196	1,243	3,195	1,419	3,203	1,320
Leicestershire	1,846	758	1,829	724	1,835	755	1,860	747	1,933	776
Lincolnshire	1,188	509	1,212	516	1,214	528	1,164	452	1,157	513
Merseyside	4,687	1,757	4,690	1,781	4,688	1,773	4,536	1,797	4,271	1,825
Metropolitan	27,804	16,205	27,695	16,324	27,627	15,767	27,395	16,762	27,049	15,353
Norfolk	1,419	499	1,437	531	1,419	548	1,392	553	1,399	616
Northamptonshire	1,197	467	1,190	518	1,171	500	1,161	492	1,186	583
Northumbria	3,578	1,381	3,595	1,330	3,593	1,397	3,611	1,402	3,693	1,332
North Wales	1,369	491	1,359	507	1,369	484	1,352	472	1,381	554
North Yorkshire	1,411	483	1,349	464	1,323	522	1,311	537	1,334	623
Nottinghamshire	2,343	802	2,360	871	2,345	934	2,314	1,022	2,339	1,058

Police officer and civilian strength 1992 to 1996

Force	*31 October 1992*[1]		*31 October 1993*[1]		*31 October 1994*[1]		*30 September 1995*[1]		*30 September 1996*[1]	
	Police	*Civilians*	*Police*	*Civilians*	*Police*	*Civilians*	*Police*	*Civilians*	*Police*	*Civilians*
South Wales	3,182	1,180	3,159	1,279	3,048	1,215	2,954	1,240	2,913	1,233
South Yorkshire	3,013	986	3,022	1,211	3,030	1,283	3,041	1,292	3,128	1,398
Staffordshire	2,196	781	2,194	773	2,207	763	2,190	800	2,220	794
Suffolk	1,240	556	1,224	543	1,209	544	1,158	520	1,159	532
Surrey	1,684	650	1,663	709	1,673	721	1,656	796	1,652	793
Sussex	3,007	1,131	2,977	1,153	2,949	1,182	3,020	1,219	3,097	1,310
Thames Valley	3,843	1,603	3,886	1,647	3,887	1,767	3,760	1,913	3,682	1,972
Warwickshire	1,007	356	1,031	364	1,038	363	983	412	948	406
West Mercia	2,061	967	2,057	969	2,042	995	2,008	1,038	2,011	1,002
West Midlands	6,935	2,717	6,961	2,729	6,991	2,859	7,078	2,957	7,203	2,611
West Yorkshire	5,095	2,034	5,005	2,032	5,036	2,092	5,122	2,149	5,154	2,224
Wiltshire	1,257	523	1,272	516	1,260	501	1,236	521	1,166	514
Total	126,043	53,858	125,878	54,953	125,492	55,275	124,710	57,790	125,050	57,278

[1] Strength information is collected on the last day of the month. Civilian strength includes traffic wardens.
[2] Since April 1995 information on police numbers is collected only twice a year (March and September).

Disabled Prisoners

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many registered disabled prisoners were in each of Her Majesty's prisons on the last date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement; [9086]

(2) if he will make a statement on his policy concerning disabled prisoners; [9087]

(3) how many registered disabled offenders were received into custody during each year since 1990 and to date in 1996; and if he will make a statement. [9089]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the Prison Service's policy concerning disabled prisoners, the number of registered disabled offenders who were received into custody during each year since 1990 and to date in 1996, and the number of registered disabled prisoners who were in each of Her Majesty's prisons on the last day for which figures are available.

On 20 November 1996 the Prison Service issued Instruction to Governors 79/1996, entitled "Disability Discrimination Act 1995: Disabled Prisoners and Visitors". This instruction outlines the Prison Service's policy with regard to the provision of goods, facilities and services for disabled prisoners and visitors to establishments. A copy of the instruction is enclosed and I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library.

The Prison Service has not, historically, kept records of the number of prisoners who are registered disabled and could therefore only be provided at disproportionate cost. We have recently put in hand a survey of the number of disabled prisoners in our custody, whether registered disabled or not. I shall be pleased to write to you again when we have analysed the results.

Mr. Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which prisons have been adapted to hold *(a)* disabled prisoners who require wheelchair access and *(b)* other physically disabled prisoners; what adaptations have been made to the prisons; and if he will make a statement. [9088]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Alex Carlile, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about which prisons have been adapted to hold (a) disabled prisoners who require wheelchair access and (b) other physically disabled prisoners.

The practice of the Prison Service is for staff to ensure that the needs of prisoners with disabilities are met on an individual basis, from reception throughout their time in custody. Staff assess their requirements and seek to provide particular facilities depending on the nature of their disability. The construction of facilities for disabled prisoners is part of this process and local minor work e.g. cell modification, will cover most individual needs. For this reason we do not have comprehensive central records of all modifications made to buildings and it is not therefore possible to categorise prisons into those that do or do not have provision for disabled prisoners.

Our standard briefing guides for new buildings provide for access ramps, lifts, toilets, and for circulation routes to be made suitable for the passage of wheelchairs. Wherever practical these guides are also taken into account when existing facilities are refurbished.

Staff

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* non-permanent staff there have been in (i) his Department and (ii) executive agencies of his Department in each year since 1992. [9666]

Mr. Howard: The tables set out available information for the Home Office and its executive agencies. The information for the agencies has been provided by the chief executives of the United Kingdom Passport Agency and the Fire Service College, the Director General of the Forensic Science Service and the Director General of the Prison Service. The information for the non-Prison Service Home Office gives the position as at 20 November and that for the Prison Service gives the position as at 2 December. Non-permanent staff include casuals, certain industrial staff and those staff having neither an established nor a fixed-term employment status.

For the purpose of producing statistics on civil service staff, fixed-term appointees are regarded as permanent staff, and are, therefore, included in the figures for permanent staff given. Information under *(b)* for the years prior to 1996 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Table 1: Home Office excluding agencies

	(a) Permanent staff	*(b) Non-permanent staff*
1996	9,280	373
1995	9,252	—
1994	10,367	—
1993	9,378	—
1992	12.069	—

The 1992 figures predate the formation of the Forensic Science Service as an executive agency: staff who formed the agency on the 1 April 1992 are therefore included in these figures.

Table 2: Forensic Science Service

	(a) Permanent staff	*(b) Non-permanent staff*
1996	1,197	8
1995	725	—
1994	706	—
1993	646	—

The 1996 figure includes staff joining the FSS from the Metropolitan Police Laboratory. Figures for 1993–95 are taken from MANDATE returns to Cabinet Office.

Table 3: Fire Service College

	(a) Permanent staff	*(b) Non-permanent staff*
1996	179	9
1995	189	5
1994	181	5
1993	152	—

Figures for 1993 are taken from MANDATE returns to Cabinet Office.

Table 4: United Kingdom Passport Agency

	(a) Permanent staff	*(b) Non-permanent staff*
1996	1,525	465
1995	1,411	315
1994	1,352	201
1993	1,474	116
1992	1,304	92

Table 5: Her Majesty's Prison Service

	(a) Permanent staff	*(b) Non-permanent staff*
1996	[1]40,505	900
1995	39,275	—
1994	38,964	—
1993	38,008	—
1992	33,606	—

[1] The information has been taken from the Prison Service personnel information system which is currently being updated using a new computer system.

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for his Department *(a)* how many people in total are employed, *(b)* how many of the total number of staff are (i) male and (ii) female and *(c)* how many (I) men and (II) women are employed on a (1) full-time and (2) part-time basis. [7487]

Mr. Howard: The table sets out the available information for the Home Office and the executive agencies. The information for the agencies has been provided by the chief executives of the United Kingdom Passport Agency and the Fire Service College, the Director General of the Forensic Science Service, and the Director General of the Prison Service. This information gives the position as at 16 December. The Prison Service is in the process of transferring to a new establishment-based computer system for the provision of personnel information.

Area	*Male*			*Female*			*Total*
	Full-time	*Part-time*	*Total*	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Total*	
Home Office Main	4,476	43	4,519	3,616	679	4,295	8,814
Her Majesty's Prison Service	30,219	1,052	31,271	7,058	1,425	8,483	39,754
Forensic Science Service	596	3	599	516	141	657	1,256
Fire Service College	109	1	110	79	8	87	197
United Kingdom Passport Agency	520	24	544	782	234	1,106	1,560
Total	35,920	1,123	37,043	12,051	2,487	14,628	51,581

Home Office figures are for permanent non-industrial staff.

Information Technology (Euro)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what tenders his Department has put out to convert its information technology systems to be euro compliant; what are the cost and person hours required to convert the systems to handle the euro; and when he expects his Department's systems to be fully economic and monetary union compliant. [9451]

Mr. Howard: My Department and agencies will need to assess the impact which a single currency, assumed to be starting on 1 January 1999, would have on their information systems, whether or not the United Kingdom decides to participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union.

Pregnant Prisoners

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what medical provision and supervision is available to pregnant category A women in Holloway prison. [9274]

Mr. Nelson: No. My Department has placed in the Library of the House statistics of export licences issued for military, security and paramilitary goods and arms, ammunition and related material to all destinations. These statistics cover 1993, 1994 1995 and the first half of 1996. Statistics for the second half of 1996 will be placed in the Library of the House as soon as they are prepared early in 1997.

Also placed in the Library of the House are similar statistics for such licences refused in the first half of 1996. Statistics for the second half of 1996 will be placed in the Library of the House early in 1997.

The annual reports of the Export Control Organisation for 1993 and 1994, copies of which are in the Library of the House, contain details of licences refused in those years.

Official Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list for each of the Ministers in his Department how many official ministerial visits they have undertaken since 1 January; and how many of these have been abroad. [9383]

Mr. Lang: Official ministerial visits undertaken by my Ministers and me since 1 January 1996 are shown in the table, which also shows the number undertaken abroad.

	Total visits	*Visits abroad*
President of the Board of Trade	37	8
Lord Fraser	38	12
Mr. Nelson	26	24
Mr. Knight	14	0
Mr. Tim Eggar	15	3
Mr. J. Taylor	55	4
Mr. I. Taylor	67	17
Mr. Page	54	2
Mr. Oppenheim	6	3

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) pursuant to his answers of 10 December, *Official Report,* columns *87–89,* on what occasions his Department used the services of Dellcourts Ltd. (Totnes); and in relation to which applications for RSA; [9121]

(2) pursuant to his answers of 10 December, *Official Report,* columns *87–89,* if the contract for Mr. A's retention as an adviser to his Department was made through his companies. [9120]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answers 16 December 1996]:* Dellcourts Ltd., a company owned and controlled by Mr. A, was contracted to provide accountancy advice to the Department's south-west regional office, later the Government Office for the south-west, from 1 February 1993 to 15 April 1995. During that time, it assisted in the appraisal of 71 regional selective assistance cases, as well as advising on applications under SMART—small firms merit award for research and technology—and SPUR—support for products under research—technology services and on business links.

Mr. A also advised on a further 49 regional selective assistance cases between 5 February 1991 and 31 January 1993 under the terms of a contract made directly with him which included provision for all remuneration to be paid to Dellcourts Ltd.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answers of 10 December, *Official Report,* columns *87–89,* if it was acceptable practice within the terms of his contract for Mr. A to make direct written contact with applicants for RSA while he was retained as an adviser to his Department. [9122]

Mr. Knight *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* External advisers assisting in regional assistance cases are free to correspond or otherwise communicate with applicants to clarify aspects of their appraisal.

Business Links

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many business links have set up help desks and practice boards in each region, since October; and at what cost to his Department. [8936]

Mr. Page: Every business link partnership is required to provide an effective inquiry and information point as part of its service to its customers. The costs are met by contributions from a variety of sources, including local partners and the Department of Trade and Industry. Two business links have opened since October, bringing the total to 236.

Investment

Mr. Milburn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for each year since 1979, what was the value of *(a)* inward investment, *(b)* outward investment, *(c)* acquisitions in the United Kingdom by overseas companies, *(d)* acquisitions overseas by United Kingdom companies and *(e)* the proportion of inward investment that is accounted for by acquisitions in the United Kingdom by overseas companies. [7829]

Mr. Greg Knight *[holding answer 6 December 1996]:* The table shows the flows of direct investment in each year. Their volatility reflects the economic cycle and the peaks and troughs of acquisitions. They are, therefore, not a good indicator of the general trend of direct foreign investment.

Since 1979, the total stock of inward investment into the UK has more than tripled, and the UK continues to be the number one location for Japanese, US and Korean investment in the EU.

	(a) Inward investment £ million	*(b) Outward investment £ million*	*(c) Acquisitions in the UK £ million*	*(d) Acquisitions overseas £ million*	*(e) Percentage acquisitions in inward investment*
1979	3,030	5,889	166	1,384	5.5
1980	4,355	4,867	797	1,772	18.3
1981	2,932	6,005	875	2,403	29.8
1982	3,027	4,091	249	915	8.2
1983	3,386	5,417	556	1,919	16.4

	(a) Inward investment £ million	(b) Outward investment £ million	(c) Acquisitions in the UK £ million	(d) Acquisitions overseas £ million	(e) Percentage acquisitions in inward investment
1984	–181	6,042	659	2,685	n/a
1985	4,504	8,430	677	3,094	15.0
1986	5,837	11,649	1,355	6,521	23.2
1987	9,449	19,147	2,999	6,985	31.7
1988	12,006	20,863	3,147	7,665	26.2
1989	18,567	21,503	5,889	9,513	31.7
1990	18,514	10,490	9,952	7,198	53.8
1991	9,058	9,056	4,781	4,754	52.8
1992	9,184	10,850	6,272	5,037	68.3
1993	10,298	17,026	5,309	3,681	51.6
1994	6,823	18,363	2,960	6,667	43.4
1995	20,480	25,546	12,304	6,213	60.1

Note:
Figures represent the flows of direct net investment. Investment includes investors' shares of the unremitted profits, their net acquisition of share and loan capital, changes in inter-company accounts and changes in branch/head office indebtedness. Inward investment includes property investments by overseas companies and investments made by individuals. Outward investment includes real estate transactions by non-bank financial institutions and persons. It also includes non-bank financial institutions' loans and mortgages to overseas residents.
Source:
"United Kingdom Balance of Payments, The Pink Book" 1990, 1994, 1996.
Office for National Statistics.

Road Haulage Firms (Liquidations)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many road haulage firms have gone into liquidation in each year from 1990 to 1995. [9128]

Mr. John M. Taylor: The table shows company compulsory liquidations and individual bankruptcies for the road transport industry in England and Wales 1992 to 1995—1992 is the first complete year for which data are available.

Insolvencies: road haulage industry

(England and Wales)

Year	Company compulsory liquidations	Individual bankruptcy orders
1992	397	1,736
1993	294	1,481
1994	235	1,149
1995	204	924

Source:
DTI.

Confidential Payments to Individuals

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the grants and other financial assistance within his responsibility which are paid to private individuals whose identity is kept confidential. [9710]

Mr. Greg Knight: Unless information falls under one of the exemptions in the code of practice on access to Government information, the identity of recipients for grants and financial assistance paid to individuals is made publicly available.

EU Third Framework Programme Grants

Mr. Radice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the names of each United Kingdom company and institution which received grants under the European Union third framework programme between 1991 and 1994. [9048]

Mr. Ian Taylor: Full information on research projects funded in individual member states by the third framework programme is held only by the European Commission, and is not distributed to member states. UK researchers have, however, participated vigorously in the EU's framework programmes. Commission statistics show that 2,337 UK research teams participated in projects funded under the third framework—more than in any other member state.

Mr. Radice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what the total spending on research and development in the United Kingdom was under the European Union third framework programme between 1991 and 1994. [9047]

Mr. Taylor: The UK's notional contribution to the European Community research and development budget for the period of the third framework programme was:

Financial year	National UK contribution to EC budget £ million
1990–91	207.3
1991–92	189.3
1992–93	252.9
1993–94	285.0

British Coal Enterprise

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he last discussed the sale of British Coal Enterprise with the chairman of British Coal; and what receipts have been achieved from the sale of British Coal Enterprise *(a)* outplacing and career counselling, *(b)* finance and business loan and *(c)* workshop activities. [9700]

Establishment	Cost per place
Featherstone	17,354
Feltham	16,942
Ford	10,906
Frankland	39,262
Full Sutton	33,718
Garth	18,944
Gartree	22,560
Glen Parva	15,480
Glocuester	28,509
Grendon	18,274
Guys Marsh	17,632
Haslar	15,152
Hatfield	21,906
Havering	16,492
Hewell Grange	13,955
Highdown	18,342
Highpoint	14,486
Hindley	18,879
Hollesley Bay	21,978
Holloway	30,986
Holme House	17,078
Hull	28,502
Huntercombe	14,518
Kingston	20,718
Kirkham	13,581
Kirklevington	18,622
Lancaster	19,696
Lancaster Farms	22,085
Latchmere House	12,053
Leeds	17,207
Leicester	39,640
Lewes	19,224
Leyhill	16,120
Lincoln	24,130
Lindholme	17,587
Littlehey	14,685
Liverpool	17,915
Long Lartin	35,143
Low Newton	27,049
Maidstone	18,051
Manchester	20,496
Moorland	17,724
Morton Hall	12,427
Mount	12,704
New Hall	26,513
North Sea Camp	14,816
Northallerton	29,754
Norwich	35,505
Nottingham	26,462
Onley	14,310
Parkhurst	28,628
Pentonville	17,203
Portland	15,634
Preston	27,069
Ranby	17,181
Reading	25,026
Risley	16,639
Rochester	18,398
Send	15,782
Shepton Mallet	23,796
Shrewsbury	31,858
Stafford	22,001
Standford Hill	14,824
Stocken	16,544
Stoke Heath	16,963
Styal	22,418
Sudbury	15,053
Swaleside	17,682
Swansea	28,037
Swinfen Hall	22,899
Thorn Cross	17,017
Usk	20,479
Verne	15,213
Wakefield	23,785
Wandsworth	16,300
Wayland	13,588
Wealstun Closed	15,621
Wellingborough	15,900
Werrington	20,619
Wetherby	28,144
Whatton	17,709
Whitemoor	34,772
Winchester	25,042
Wolds	21,960
Woodhill	20,618
Wormwood Scrubs	17,163
Wymott	14,148

Prison Population

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the overall *(a)* average base line certified normal accommodation, *(b)* average in use CNA and *(c)* average population for the Prison Service for each month this year; [9108]

(2) if he will list the *(a)* average baseline certified normal accommodation, *(b)* average in use CNA and *(c)* average population by prison type for each month this year. [9107]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsbility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the total baseline CNA, average baseline CNA, average in use CNA and average population by prison type each month this year.

Prison type is defined as the role of the prison, for example local prison, closed or open training prison, closed or open young offender institutions or juvenile institutions. Most prisons perform more than one role, which is recorded within the relevant prison type.

Baseline CNA is the total number of uncrowded places in the prison estate, including those which are out of use due to refurbishment. Information on baseline CNA is not available in the form requested as it is not recorded by prison type. In use CNA represents the total number of uncrowded places estimated to be available in the estate.

With the exception of baseline CNA the information contained in the attached tables is available monthly in a publication called "Occupation of prisons, remand centres, young offender institutions and police cells", which is available in the Library.

	January 1996	February 1996	March 1996	April 1996	May 1996	June 1996	July 1996	August 1996	September 1996	October 1996
IN USE CNA										
Female—female closed training prisons	559	559	559	559	559	564	566	566	683	683
Female—female closed young offender institutions	123	123	123	123	123	123	123	123	123	123
Female—local prisons	926	928	1,007	1,007	1,007	1,007	1,005	1,005	1,005	1,005
Female—open prisons	452	452	452	452	452	452	456	456	456	452
Female—open young offender institutions	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	53	53
Female—remand centres	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Male—dispersal prisons	—	—	—	3,297	3,297	3,297	3,297	3,297	3,109	3,250
Male—closed training prisons	21,064	21,024	21,294	18,857	18,850	19,293	19,297	19,336	19,095	19,191
Male—other young offender institutions (closed)	3,988	3,988	3,988	3,995	3,995	4,145	4,186	4,114	4,119	4,116
Male—juvenile institutions	1,088	1,088	1,088	1,088	1,088	1,088	1,032	1,032	1,032	1,077
Male—local prisons	15,989	15,698	15,657	15,039	15,039	15,698	15,931	15,717	15,818	16,040
Male open prisons	3,816	3,822	3,822	3,822	3,846	3,834	3,884	3,884	3,791	3,944
Male—other young offender institutions (open)	476	476	476	476	476	552	552	552	496	496
Male remand centres	2,921	2,915	2,915	2,915	2,915	3,041	3,070	3,070	3,065	3,065
Total	51,460	51,131	51,439	51,688	51,705	53,152	53,457	53,210	52,850	53,500

	January 1996	February 1996	March 1996	April 1996	May 1996	June 1996	July 1996	August 1996	September 1996	October 1996
Population										
Female—female closed training prisons	549	553	548	550	554	580	610	645	663	667
Female—female closed young offender institutions	104	111	127	126	134	137	135	141	139	156
Female—local prisons	995	997	1,038	1,076	1,052	1,098	1,089	1,056	1,070	1,113
Female—open prisons	355	391	386	396	452	457	461	427	412	446
Female—open young offender institutions	22	25	24	31	29	33	32	30	33	38
Female—remand centres	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Male—dispersal prisons				3,173	3,165	3,142	3,282	3,278	3,287	3,388
Male—closed training prisons	20,082	20,334	20,747	18,290	18,417	18,551	18,685	18,469	18,577	18,705
Male—other young offender institutions (closed)	3,738	3,850	3,898	3,944	3,972	3,943	3,976	3,921	4,003	4,045
Male—juvenile institutions	1,222	1,289	1,308	1,295	1,365	1,417	1,383	1,367	1,432	1,446
Male—local prisons	18,548	18,881	18,817	18,439	18,540	18,895	19,179	18,987	19,621	20,196
Male open prisons	3,186	3,481	3,583	3,554	3,576	3,650	3,749	3,639	3,677	3,696
Male—other young offender institutions (open)	370	377	366	357	369	354	394	389	384	408
Male remand centres	2,776	2,889	2,898	2,971	2,888	2,999	3,166	3,188	3,323	3,460
Total	51,947	53,178	53,740	54,202	54,513	55,256	56,141	55,537	56,621	57,764

Total baseline CNA, in use CNA and population

	Baseline CNA	In use CNA	Population
January 1996	54,949	51,460	51,947
February 1996	54,979	51,131	53,178
March 1996	55,164	51,439	53,740
April 1996	51,688	51,688	54,202
May 1996	51,705	51,705	54,513
June 1996	53,152	53,152	55,256
July 1996	53,457	53,457	56,141
August 1996	53,210	53,210	55,537
September 1996	52,850	52,850	56,621
October 1996	56,835	53,500	57,764

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* average base line certified normal accommodation, *(b)* average in use CNA and *(c)* average population of each prison for the first six months of the current financial year. [9106]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average baseline CNA, in use CNA and population for each prison for the first six months of the current financial year.

The information requested is given in the accompanying tables and I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library.

Baseline CNA

Prison	*April 1996*	*May 1996*	*June 1996*	*July 1996*	*August 1996*	*September 1996*
Acklington	662	662	662	662	662	662
Albany	436	436	436	436	436	436
Aldington	146	146	146	146	146	146
Ashwell	404	404	404	404	404	404
Askham Grange	126	126	126	130	130	130
Aylesbury	297	297	297	297	297	297
Bedford	309	309	309	309	309	309
Belmarsh	841	841	841	841	841	841
Birmingham	696	696	696	696	696	717
Blakenhurst	649	649	649	647	647	647
Blantyre House	106	106	106	120	120	120
Blundeston	408	408	408	408	408	408
Brinsford	473	473	473	477	477	477
Bristol	493	493	493	493	493	493
Brixton	720	720	720	720	720	720
Brockhill	159	159	159	159	159	159
Buckley Hall	350	350	350	350	350	350
Bullingdon	644	644	644	644	644	644
Bullwood Hall	125	125	125	125	125	125
Camp Hill	470	470	470	470	470	470
Canterbury	184	184	184	184	184	184
Cardiff	327	327	327	534	534	534
Castington	300	300	300	300	300	300
Channings Wood	594	594	594	594	594	594
Chelmsford	248	248	248	248	248	248
Coldingley	296	296	296	296	296	296
Cookham Wood	120	120	120	120	120	120
Dartmoor	599	599	599	599	599	599
Deerbolt	450	450	450	450	450	450
Doncaster	771	771	771	771	771	771
Dorchester	147	147	147	147	147	147
Dover	316	316	316	316	316	316
Downview	287	287	291	291	291	291
Drake Hall	285	285	285	285	285	285
Durham	651	651	646	646	646	646
East Sutton Park	94	94	94	94	94	94
Eastwood Park	135	135	135	135	135	135
Elmley	637	637	637	637	640	640
Erlestoke	270	270	270	270	270	270
Everthorpe	438	438	438	438	438	438
Exeter	261	261	261	261	261	260
Featherstone	599	599	599	599	599	599
Feltham	876	876	876	876	876	876
Finnamore Wood	106	106	106	106	106	0
Ford	533	533	533	533	533	533
Frankland	447	447	447	447	447	447
Full Sutton	602	602	602	602	602	602
Garth	513	513	513	513	513	513
Gartree	360	360	360	360	360	360
Glen Parva	852	852	852	852	852	852
Gloucester	211	211	211	211	211	211
Grendon	455	455	455	455	455	455
Guy's Marsh	300	300	300	300	300	300
Haslar	158	158	158	158	158	158
Hatfield	180	180	180	180	180	180
Haverigg	454	454	450	450	450	450
Hewell Grange	174	174	174	200	200	200
High Down	649	649	649	649	649	649
Highpoint	679	679	679	679	679	679
Hindley	339	339	531	531	531	531
Hollesley Bay	458	458	458	458	458	458
Holloway	517	517	517	517	517	517
Holme House	649	649	751	751	783	783
Hull	362	362	404	418	438	438
Huntercombe	240	240	240	256	256	256
Kingston	155	155	155	185	185	185
Kirkham	644	644	644	644	644	644
Kirklevington	100	100	100	100	100	100
Lancaster Farms	218	218	218	218	218	218
Lancaster House	378	378	438	438	438	438
Latchmere	177	177	177	177	177	177
Leeds	995	995	995	995	995	1,141
Leicester	207	207	207	207	207	207

Baseline CNA

Prison	*April 1996*	*May 1996*	*June 1996*	*July 1996*	*August 1996*	*September 1996*
Lewes	443	443	443	444	444	444
Leyhill	410	410	410	410	410	410
Lincoln	434	434	434	434	434	434
Lindholme	670	670	670	670	670	670
Littlehey	584	584	584	584	584	584
Liverpool	1,158	1,158	1,158	1,216	1,216	1,216
Long Lartin	446	446	446	446	446	446
Low Newton	198	198	198	198	198	198
Maidstone	539	539	539	539	539	539
Manchester	967	967	967	967	967	967
Moorland	620	620	620	620	620	620
Morton Hall	168	192	192	192	192	192
Mount	588	588	588	588	588	588
New Hall	207	207	207	207	207	207
North Sea Camp	203	203	213	213	213	213
Northallerton	152	152	152	152	152	152
Norwich	319	319	319	319	319	319
Nottingham	218	218	218	218	218	218
Onley	520	520	520	520	520	520
Oxford	122	122	122	122	122	0
Parkhurst	431	431	431	430	430	430
Pentonville	924	924	924	882	882	882
Portland	526	526	526	526	526	526
Preston	407	407	407	407	407	407
Ranby	516	516	517	517	517	517
Reading	183	183	203	203	203	203
Risley	826	826	826	957	957	957
Rochester	424	424	424	424	424	424
Send	151	151	151	151	151	151
Shepton Mallet	158	158	158	158	158	158
Shrewsbury	176	176	176	176	176	176
Stafford	434	434	434	434	434	434
Standford Hill	384	384	384	384	384	384
Stocken	396	396	396	396	396	396
Stoke Heath	372	372	382	382	382	382
Styal	253	253	255	257	257	257
Sudbury	517	517	517	517	517	424
Swaleside	512	512	512	512	512	512
Swansea	208	208	208	208	208	208
Swinfen Hall	191	191	191	191	191	196
Thorn Cross	300	300	316	316	316	316
Usk	246	246	246	246	246	246
Verne	552	552	552	552	552	552
Wakefield	727	727	727	727	727	715
Wandsworth	1,219	1,219	1,219	1,219	1,219	1,219
Wayland	580	580	580	580	580	580
Wealstun	573	573	573	578	578	578
Wellingborough	352	352	352	352	352	352
Werrington	114	114	114	114	114	114
Wetherby	120	120	120	120	120	120
Whatton	217	216	216	216	216	216
Whitemoor	534	534	534	534	534	534
Winchester	462	462	462	462	462	462
Wolds	320	320	320	320	320	320
Woodhill	566	566	669	669	669	669
Wormwood Scrubs	1,158	1,158	1,176	1,176	1,168	1,168
Wymott	816	816	816	816	826	826

In use CNA

Prison	*April 1996*	*May 1996*	*June 1996*	*July 1996*	*August 1996*	*September 1996*
Acklington	662	662	662	662	662	662
Albany	436	436	436	436	436	436
Aldington	146	146	146	146	146	146
Ashwell	404	404	404	404	404	404
Askham Grange	126	126	126	130	130	130
Aylesbury	230	230	230	230	230	230
Bedford	309	309	309	309	309	309
Belmarsh	661	661	661	661	661	661
Birmingham	653	653	653	653	653	694

	In use CNA					
Prison	*April 1996*	*May 1996*	*June 1996*	*July 1996*	*August 1996*	*September 1996*
Blakenhurst	649	649	649	647	647	647
Blantyre House	106	106	106	120	120	120
Blundeston	408	408	408	408	408	408
Brinsford	473	473	473	477	477	477
Bristol	474	474	474	474	474	474
Brixton	480	480	480	480	480	480
Brockhill	159	159	159	159	159	159
Buckley Hall	350	350	350	350	350	350
Bullingdon	644	644	644	644	644	644
Bullwood Hall	125	125	125	125	125	125
Camp Hill	384	384	384	384	384	384
Canterbury	184	184	184	184	184	184
Cardiff	322	322	322	534	534	534
Castington	300	300	300	300	300	300
Channings Wood	594	594	594	594	594	594
Chelmsford	248	248	248	248	248	248
Coldingley	288	288	288	288	288	288
Cookham Wood	120	120	120	120	120	120
Dartmoor	599	599	599	599	599	599
Deerbolt	420	420	420	420	420	420
Doncaster	771	771	771	771	771	771
Dorchester	147	147	147	147	147	147
Dover	316	316	316	316	316	316
Downview	287	287	291	291	291	291
Drake Hall	285	285	285	285	285	285
Durham	499	499	598	598	598	598
East Sutton Park	94	94	94	94	94	94
Eastwood Park	135	135	135	135	135	135
Elmley	637	637	637	637	640	640
Erlestoke	270	270	270	270	270	270
Everthorpe	435	435	435	435	435	433
Exeter	253	253	253	253	253	260
Featherstone	564	564	564	564	564	564
Feltham	845	845	845	839	839	839
Finnamore Wood	56	56	56	56	56	0
Ford	498	498	498	498	498	498
Frankland	447	447	447	447	447	447
Full Sutton	572	572	572	572	572	572
Garth	513	513	513	513	513	513
Gartree	350	350	360	360	360	360
Glen Parva	792	792	792	792	720	720
Gloucester	211	211	211	211	211	211
Grendon	455	455	455	455	455	455
Guy's Marsh	300	300	300	300	300	300
Haslar	158	158	158	158	158	158
Hatfield	180	180	180	180	180	180
Haverigg	454	454	450	450	450	450
Hewell Grange	174	174	174	200	200	200
High Down	649	649	649	649	649	649
Highpoint	679	679	679	679	679	679
Hindley	339	339	531	531	531	531
Hollesley Bay	397	397	397	397	397	397
Holloway	517	517	517	517	517	517
Holme House	649	649	714	714	764	764
Hull	349	349	395	395	395	395
Huntercombe	240	240	240	256	256	256
Kingston	106	106	106	129	129	129
Kirkham	644	644	622	622	622	622
Kirklevington	100	100	100	100	100	100
Lancaster	218	218	218	218	218	218
Lancaster Farms	378	378	438	438	438	438
Latchmere House	177	177	177	177	177	177
Leeds	824	824	824	824	824	872
Leicester	207	207	207	207	207	207
Lewes	312	312	312	303	303	303
Leyhill	386	386	386	410	410	410
Lincoln	434	434	434	434	434	434
Lindholme	670	670	670	670	670	670
Littlehey	584	584	584	584	584	584
Liverpool	1,073	1,073	1,073	1,105	1,105	1,105
Long Lartin	372	372	372	372	372	372
Low Newton	198	198	192	192	192	192
Maidstone	484	484	484	539	539	539

In use CNA

Prison	*April 1996*	*May 1996*	*June 1996*	*July 1996*	*August 1996*	*September 1996*
Manchester	967	967	967	967	967	967
Moorland	620	620	620	620	620	620
Morton Hall	168	192	192	192	192	192
Mount	588	588	588	588	588	588
New Hall	207	207	207	207	207	207
North Sea Camp	203	203	213	213	213	213
Northallerton	152	152	152	152	152	152
Norwich	319	319	319	319	319	319
Nottingham	218	218	218	218	218	218
Onley	520	520	520	520	520	520
Oxford	122	122	122	122	122	0
Parkhurst	378	378	378	288	288	288
Pentonville	726	726	726	726	726	726
Portland	526	526	526	526	526	526
Preston	311	311	311	311	311	311
Ranby	516	516	517	517	517	517
Reading	183	183	203	203	203	203
Risley	790	790	790	785	785	785
Rochester	424	424	424	424	424	424
Send	137	137	137	137	137	137
Shepton Mallet	158	158	158	158	158	158
Shrewsbury	172	172	172	172	176	176
Stafford	434	434	434	434	434	434
Standford Hill	384	384	384	384	384	384
Stocken	396	396	396	396	396	396
Stoke Heath	312	312	322	322	322	322
Styal	239	239	241	243	243	243
Sudbury	488	488	488	488	488	395
Swaleside	512	512	512	512	512	512
Swansea	151	151	151	151	151	151
Swinfen Hall	191	191	191	191	191	196
Thorn Cross	240	240	316	316	316	316
Usk	246	246	246	246	246	246
Verne	552	552	552	552	552	552
Wakefield	727	727	727	727	727	539
Wandsworth	804	804	804	804	804	804
Wayland	580	574	547	574	574	574
Wealstun	573	573	573	578	578	578
Wellingborough	352	352	352	352	352	352
Werrington	114	114	114	114	114	114
Wetherby	120	120	120	120	120	120
Whatton	217	216	216	216	216	216
Whitemoor	518	518	518	518	518	518
Winchester	462	462	462	462	462	462
Wolds	320	320	320	320	320	320
Woodhill	566	566	669	669	669	669
Wormwood Scrubs	715	715	1,129	1,129	948	948
Wymott	432	432	799	799	748	748

Population

Prison	*April 1996*	*May 1996*	*June 1996*	*July 1996*	*August 1996*	*September 1996*
Acklington	656	643	644	660	629	642
Albany	430	421	435	427	430	432
Aldington	142	141	141	143	138	139
Ashwell	389	402	395	408	399	412
Askham Grange	119	121	127	122	124	120
Aylesbury	229	224	226	229	226	231
Bedford	346	327	352	347	339	350
Belmarsh	588	600	615	774	790	801
Birmingham	971	974	1,006	994	994	1,007
Blakenhurst	619	702	721	697	717	717
Blantyre House	105	100	113	109	116	119
Blundeston	385	396	404	401	394	399
Brinsford	466	474	469	465	481	491
Bristol	521	518	515	536	515	556
Brixton	581	601	588	595	580	596
Brockhill	152	123	59	70	106	129
Buckley Hall	342	349	343	340	342	350
Bullingdon	642	641	635	651	632	647

	Population					
Prison	*April 1996*	*May 1996*	*June 1996*	*July 1996*	*August 1996*	*September 1996*
Bullwood Hall	123	122	126	121	120	121
Camp Hill	402	402	409	422	405	413
Canterbury	285	282	262	286	271	276
Cardiff	477	452	541	630	636	702
Castington	292	291	287	295	296	288
Channings Wood	575	582	579	586	573	589
Chelmsford	402	390	411	404	404	451
Coldingley	283	285	286	282	286	287
Cookham Wood	129	130	134	141	148	146
Dartmoor	585	586	579	574	571	573
Deerbolt	401	411	410	412	399	415
Doncaster	861	866	896	893	889	924
Dorchester	211	211	226	226	209	229
Dover	290	310	298	307	306	307
Downview	284	285	283	282	284	291
Drake Hall	218	266	268	276	240	235
Durham	702	726	869	895	871	874
East Sutton Park	90	94	95	95	93	90
Eastwood Park	104	122	121	129	121	122
Elmley	600	621	625	620	619	624
Erlestoke	263	269	270	265	269	269
Everthorpe	429	418	411	440	448	456
Exeter	439	434	464	453	424	453
Featherstone	559	557	549	548	557	549
Feltham	835	831	860	853	823	859
Finnamore Wood	8	0	0	0	0	0
Ford	440	449	443	479	459	442
Frankland	422	417	410	427	427	425
Full Sutton	560	554	547	553	547	556
Garth	506	513	510	517	511	518
Gartree	350	352	357	362	360	357
Glen Parva	883	815	863	872	859	878
Gloucester	256	250	246	250	219	250
Grendon	416	410	418	410	420	429
Guy's Marsh	298	300	299	297	298	303
Haslar	152	151	154	150	146	156
Hatfield	155	175	171	177	163	167
Haverigg	429	443	430	465	453	462
Hewell Grange	188	193	191	192	177	184
High Down	625	645	639	642	624	649
Highpoint	670	665	662	672	632	567
Hindley	349	408	440	504	515	536
Hollesley Bay	338	347	347	378	367	388
Holloway	580	573	595	590	574	572
Holme House	644	679	663	706	706	756
Hull	399	378	365	407	402	431
Huntercombe	234	233	235	235	234	252
Kingston	99	102	103	103	106	105
Kirkham	601	616	612	615	610	597
Kirklevington	99	99	99	99	99	98
Lancaster	215	216	217	217	203	216
Lancaster Farms	378	360	428	444	446	491
Latchmere House	153	150	154	140	151	141
Leeds	893	878	888	880	879	886
Leicester	345	324	345	342	336	344
Lewes	297	305	305	309	292	312
Leyhill	381	369	388	386	368	383
Lincoln	648	645	645	651	651	660
Lindholme	641	647	642	654	641	646
Littlehey	563	566	559	573	577	576
Liverpool	1,241	1,268	1,250	1,249	1,210	1,213
Long Lartin	358	357	357	362	372	374
Low Newton	297	284	277	267	266	267
Maidstone	522	530	523	529	531	528
Manchester	1,100	1,081	1,116	1,099	1,121	1,086
Moorland	620	622	614	644	642	651
Morton Hall	164	188	186	184	189	187
Mount	578	581	577	583	584	600
New Hall	220	209	208	212	208	214
North Sea Camp	164	149	169	209	193	197
Northallerton	212	208	215	208	216	215
Norwich	380	395	393	513	562	608
Nottingham	209	212	214	206	200	201

Prison	Population					
	April 1996	May 1996	June 1996	July 1996	August 1996	September 1996
Onley	492	516	509	515	515	520
Oxford	95	77	71	51	3	0
Parkhurst	276	275	279	282	284	283
Pentonville	850	864	857	863	852	887
Portland	521	531	516	514	524	515
Preston	451	431	452	441	442	453
Ranby	499	500	512	522	515	522
Reading	195	196	224	225	230	223
Risley	749	737	739	743	726	745
Rochester	355	356	351	355	359	385
Send	133	136	134	139	144	145
Shepton Mallet	206	205	202	200	203	208
Shrewsbury	300	292	306	294	307	311
Stafford	585	596	590	600	604	601
Standford Hill	369	333	379	383	364	367
Stocken	399	401	393	415	405	408
Stoke Heath	312	311	317	308	316	322
Styal	245	248	249	249	249	254
Studbury	464	487	474	481	451	474
Swaleside	508	516	516	513	509	509
Swansea	215	231	219	211	202	224
Swinfen Hall	190	189	191	191	189	195
Thorn Cross	220	200	186	239	241	222
Usk	248	265	256	258	265	259
Verne	545	538	546	549	543	549
Wakefield	711	703	673	630	601	596
Wandsworth	861	861	855	877	874	880
Wayland	530	559	560	554	554	563
Wealstun	535	541	551	552	554	572
Wellingborough	314	314	316	317	315	315
Werrington	111	115	114	112	113	116
Wetherby	120	114	120	120	120	120
Whatton	214	216	216	216	216	222
Whitemoor	534	534	540	536	541	535
Winchester	530	519	542	553	535	552
Wolds	333	323	334	346	322	357
Woodhill	605	592	585	596	606	625
Wormwood Scrubs	1,046	1,051	1,131	1,084	1,052	1,095
Wymott	534	629	735	741	732	737

Prison Accommodation

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of prisoners sharing three to a cell designed for one in each month this year. [9104]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners sharing three to a cell designed for one this year.

No prisoners have been required to share three to a cell designed for one this year. There have been no prisoners held three to a cell designed for one since March 1994.

Mr. Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of prisoners sharing two to a cell designed for one in each month this year. [9102]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of prisoners sharing two to a cell designed for one in each month this year.

The information is given in the attached table.

Months	Number of prisoners sharing two to a cell designed for one
January 1996	8,448
February 1996	9,256
March 1996	8,626
April 1996	8,324
May 1996	8,430
June 1996	9,202
July 1996	9,236
August 1996	8,726
September 1996	8,938
October 1996	10,120

Shooting Clubs

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he plans to publish guidance concerning the criteria which shooting clubs must meet to obtain licences under the Firearms (Amendment) Bill; [8907]

(2) if he will place in the Library a draft of the criteria for the granting of licences to shooting clubs under the Firearms (Amendment) Bill; and if he will provide all shooting clubs with a copy of the draft criteria; [8917]

(3) what period of time he intends to allow to shooting clubs to comply with section 16 of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill; and what estimate he has made of the average period required to obtain planning and building regulation approvals for changes to club premises. [8918]

Miss Widdecombe: The requirements for the licensed pistol clubs envisaged by the Bill are being drafted. I will seek the views of the Firearms Consultative Committee and the British Shooting Sports Council on them, and will place the draft in the Library. My Department will publish the new requirements when they have been finalised and will also ensure that all existing shooting clubs that are approved under section 15 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 are informed of them.

A shooting club that wishes to have a licence under clause 16 of the Bill will be able to apply for that at any time after the Bill has come into force. The time it will take for clubs to obtain any necessary building consents will depend on individual circumstances.

Prison Assaults

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average assault rate in each prison during the first six months of the current financial year. [9109]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the average assault rate in each prison during the first six months of the current financial year.

Annualised assault rates for each prison for the period April to September 1996 are given in the attached table. The number of assaults has been annualised and then expressed as a proportion of the average population for that period.

Establishment	*Assault rate Percentage*
Acklington	3
Albany	1
Aldington	3
Ashwell	5
Askham Grange	2
Aylesbury	28
Bedford	6
Belmarsh	23
Birmingham	8
Blakenhurst	11
Blantyre House	0
Blundeston	9
Brinsford	23
Bristol	9
Brixton	12
Brockhill	0
Buckley Hall	4
Bullingdon	13
Bullwood Hall	49
Camp Hill	2
Canterbury	4
Cardiff	10
Castington	23
Channings Wood	2
Chelmsford	9
Coldingley	2
Cookham Wood	23
Dartmoor	6
Deerbolt	19
Doncaster	21
Dorchester	11
Dover	24
Downview	1
Drake Hall	1
Durham	6
East Sutton Park	0
Eastwood Park	39
Elmley	10
Erlestoke	4
Everthorpe	1
Exeter	9
Featherstone	5
Feltham	42
Ford	0
Frankland	11
Full Sutton	8
Garth	6
Gartree	2
Glen Parva	27
Gloucester	30
Grendon	1
Guy's Marsh	6
Haslar	1
Hatfield	5
Haverigg	0
Hewell Grange	0
Highdown	9
Highpoint	5
Hindley	26
Hollesley Bay	13
Holloway	25
Holme House	6
Hull	24
Huntercombe	15
Kingston	0
Kirkham	1
Kirklevington	0
Lancaster	3
Lancaster Farms	20
Latchmere House	0
Leeds	10
Leicester	14
Lewes	15
Leyhill	0
Lincoln	6
Lindholme	1
Littlehey	5
Liverpool	5
Long Lartin	9
Low Newton	28
Maidstone	0
Manchester	8
Moorland	17
Morton Hall	1

Establishment	Assault rate Percentage
Mount	3
New Hall	25
North Sea Camp	0
Northallerton	15
Norwich	14
Nottingham	6
Onley	19
Parkhurst	9
Pentonville	10
Portland	10
Preston	9
Ranby	2
Reading	24
Risley	6
Rochester	11
Send	1
Shepton Mallet	5
Shrewsbury	1
Stafford	8
Standford Hill	1
Stocken	3
Stoke Heath	19
Styal	7
Sudbury	1
Swaleside	5
Swansea	10
Swinfen Hall	19
Thorn Cross	20
Usk	0
Verne	1
Wakefield	3
Wandsworth	6
Wayland	0
Wealstun (Closed)	2
Wellingborough	3
Werrington	88
Wetherby	13
Whatton	1
Whitemoor	18
Winchester	6
Wolds	14
Woodhill	9
Wormwood Scrubs	9
Wymott	1

Contracting Out

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy for depositing in the Library documents concerning the contracting out of services; how many documents have been deposited in the Library since 1992 in the categories *(a)* invitation to tender, *(b)* draft contracts and *(c)* binding contracts signed by both parties; how many draft contracts contain performance targets for the contractor; and in how many cases a draft contract has been altered as a result of representations from hon. Members following deposition in the Library. [8915]

Mr. Howard: It is not general policy to deposit documents concerning the contracting out of services in the Library, but invitations to tender and contracts for both design, construction, management and finance schemes and the operation of prisons are placed in the Library, subject to the removal of pricing and other commercially sensitive details.

Since 1992, four invitations to tender, relating to Her Majesty's prisons Wolds, Blakenhurst, Buckley Hall and Doncaster, and six contracts, relating to Her Majesty's prisons Wolds, Blakenhurst, Buckley Hall, Doncaster, Bridgend and Fazakerley, have been deposited in the Library.

All Home Office contracts specify the level of service required and, in appropriate cases, performance targets.

No draft contracts have been deposited, or altered as a result of representation from hon. Members.

Prisoner Transfers

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the implementation of the recommendations of the interdepartmental working group chaired by Lord Ferrers in respect of the transfer of prisoners from prisons in Great Britain to similar institutions in Northern Ireland. [9688]

Miss Widdecombe: In his statement of 23 November 1992, the then Minister of State indicated that the Government had accepted in full the recommendations of the interdepartmental working group, and set out the arrangements which would apply to the transfer of prisoners between jurisdictions. These have worked satisfactorily and have been upheld in judicial review hearings. There is regular contact between officials in Great Britain and Northern Ireland about the implementation of the transfer arrangements, about which Ministers are kept fully informed. My right hon. and learned Friend has reviewed the current legal provisions relating to transfers and has made provision in the Crime (Sentences) Bill, currently before Parliament, for changes to these, as recommended by the interdepartmental working group.

Official Ministerial Visits

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each of the Ministers in his Department how many official ministerial visits they have undertaken since 1 January; and how many of these have been abroad. [9376]

Mr. Howard: The information requested is as follows:

	Total visits	Visits abroad
Mr. Michael Howard	103	10
Baroness Blatch	42	1
Ann Widdecombe	123	4
Mr. David Maclean	40	0
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope	37	6
Mr. Tom Sackville	39	3

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Criminal Cases Review Commission will be established; if he will list the names of the people who will be appointed as members; and when the commission will start work. [10396]

Mr. Howard: The Criminal Cases Review Commission will be established on 1 January 1997. Its members will be:

Sir Frederick Crawford (Chairman)

Miss Fiona King

Mr. Laurence Elks

Mr. David Kyle

Mr. John Leckey

Miss Jill Gort

Mr. Baden Skitt

Mr. John Knox

Dr. James MacKeith

Mr. Karamjit Singh

Professor Leonard Leigh

Mr. Edward Weiss

Mr. Anthony Foster

Mr. Barry Capon.

The commission will need a period of time to appoint and train its staff, and to develop its working methods, before it takes on its caseworking responsibilities. It will take on responsibility for considering cases on 31 March 1997.

Members of Parliament (Bribery)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further consideration he has given to the recommendation from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, in its first report, that the law relating to bribery of hon. Members of Parliament should be clarified. [10397]

Mr. Howard: I have today published a paper on this subject, and have placed copies in the Library. I have also sent copies to the House of Commons Committee on Standards and Privileges, and the House of Lords Committee for Privileges.

Criminal Investigations Code

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to lay before Parliament the code of practice prepared under part II of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996; and when it will come into effect. [10398]

Mr. Maclean: In view of the interest in the code of practice among criminal justice practitioners, I am laying it before Parliament today. This is to assist them in preparing for the implementation of parts I and II of the Act next year.

Before the code can take effect, Parliament must approve an order bringing it into operation. I will lay an order seeking approval before Parliament as soon as possible next year. I am not yet able to do so, because the disclosure scheme in part I, which the code supports, depends on a number of sets of rules of court. These are currently the subject of consultation with criminal justice practitioners, and it is too early to say exactly when they will be ready to be implemented.

Asylum and Immigration Appeals

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for reviewing the system of asylum and immigration appeals. [10474]

Mr. Howard: My right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor and I intend to review the current system of asylum and immigration appeals, so as to establish, among other things, whether it provides adequate rights of appeal consistent with the costs to public funds and the impact upon the operation of the immigration control. We shall publish our conclusions in due course as a basis for consultation with interested parties.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Home Visits

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultations he has had with the chief executive of the Benefits Agency concerning the ending of agency home visits; and if he will make a statement. [5905]

Mr. Roger Evans: The Benefits Agency has not stopped home visits to people claiming or in receipt of benefits. In July 1995, the agency introduced new criteria for determining when income support new claim visits and review visits should be made. This has improved customer service, accuracy, verification and validation of income support claims.

The agency is undertaking a wide-ranging review of its activities, as part of the overall departmental change programme designed to make efficient use of public funds while maintaining high standards of customer service. As part of this review, from 1 April 1996, visits are made only to customers with particular difficulties of access and under the security control programme.

Contracts

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many contracts have been made between his Department and *(a)* Andersens, *(b)* BMI, *(c)* Capita, *(d)* EDS and *(e)* Sema; and what is the nature of each service provided. [6734]

Mr. Burt: The information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Such information as is available is as follows.

EDS—Four projects with contracts with the Child Support Agency placed between 1992 and 1995; Operational accounting system; maintenance assessment; support to the live running of the system; a technical services agreement to

provide resources to develop the system. One project with the Information Technology Services Agency to outsource the Department's data centre services. This contract involves taking over the complete data centre services provision for the Department. A framework for computer and related services.

ANDERSENS—Replacement of the national insurance recording system (NIRS1) with a new system (NIRS2). A framework for computer and related services. Framework for management consultancy. A framework for accountancy consultancy.

BMI—Audiology services.

SEMA—Small systems support. A framework for computer and related services. A framework for management consultancy.

CAPITA—framework for management consultancy.

Benefit Appeals Procedure

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will take steps to speed up the benefits appeals procedure. [7980]

Mr. Roger Evans: We have done so. The benefits appeals procedure is constantly under review and I hold regular meetings with officials.

The Independent Tribunal Service, through its change programme, continues to look for ways to improve clearance times.

We introduced regulations, which came into force on 21 October, amending the appeals process which should help to reduce the time it takes to clear appeals. Among other changes they

aim to reduce confusion by requiring a specified form to be used when appealing and specifying the information which has to be given by the appellant;

streamline the administration of appeals by providing for oral hearings only at the request of an interested party or the chairman of a tribunal, otherwise paper hearings, and reducing the minimum notice of an oral hearing to seven days for all jurisdictions except child support;

relieve the burden on tribunal chairman by allowing the clerk to the tribunal to make certain decisions, such as postponements, amend the circumstances in which an appeal may be struck out for want of prosecution and the circumstances in which these appeals may be reinstated, and allow for the issue of a summary decision, with a full decision available on request.

Pensioners (Income Support)

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 18 November, *Official Report*, column *451*, for the years *(a)* 2000–1 and *(b)* 2010–11, what is his estimate (i) of the number of additional pensioners eligible to claim income support as a result of the retirement pension not being increased annually in accordance with earnings, (ii) of the additional cost, at 1995–96 prices and (iii) of the additional cost of administration, assuming that the difference between the per capita costs of administering the basic retirement pension and income support in 1995–96 were applied to subsequent years, that the basic retirement pension continued to be price-indexed and that the number and amount of other sources of income remained as now. [8248]

Mr. Heald: Estimated numbers of additional pensioners in receipt of income support and the additional cost to income support as a result of the basic retirement pension not being uprated in accordance with earnings are given in the table. The table also contains estimates as a result of the basic retirement pension not being increased in accordance with the higher of prices and average earnings. Estimates have been made using Pensim, a dynamic simulation model that projects pensioners' incomes into the next century. Pensim estimates are based on a number of economic and behavioral assumptions, and in particular that average earnings increase by 1.5 per cent. per year above prices. Due to the reliance on assumptions and the time period covered, caseload estimates have been rounded to the nearest 100,000 and cost estimates to the nearest £100 million, and should be treated with caution. Further details of the methodology and assumptions used by Pensim are outlined in GES working paper No. 129 "Pensim: A Dynamic Simulation Model of Pensioner Incomes". Copies are available in the Library.

Number of additional pensioners in receipt of income support, as a result of the basic retirement pension not being increased annually in accordance with earnings since 1980

	2000–01		*2010–11*	
	Additional pensioners in receipt of IS	*Additional cost to IS £ million*	*Additional pensioners in receipt of IS*	*Additional cost to IS £ million*
Basic retirement pension increasing in line with average earnings	900,000	600	600,000	400
Basic retirement pension increasing in line with higher of average earnings and prices	900,000	600	600,000	400
Estimated administration cost to nearest £1 million	—	32	—	21

1. Pensioners are defined as those single aged at state pension age or above, or couples in which the husband is aged at state pension age or above.
2. Caseload figures have been rounded to the nearest 100,000. Cost figures have been rounded to the nearest £100 million.
3. Costs are at 1995–96 prices.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, column *316*, what estimate he has made of the average weekly charge above preserved rights to income support for *(a)* men and *(b)* women in (i) residential care and (ii) nursing homes. [9352]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is set out in the table:

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Peter Bottomley, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question on medical provision and supervision available to pregnant category A women in Holloway prison.

Holloway prison has a dedicated wing with specialist expertise and interest in caring for pregnant women. Admission to the unit is on a voluntary basis. Holloway, along with all prisons has the back up of the National Health Service, for both in-patient and out-patient facilities. In addition, consultants are contracted by the Prison Service to carry out clinics in the prisons themselves. Where necessary, prisoners are taken under escort to outside hospitals.

Prisoners (Drug Dependency)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what rights prisoners detained in England and Wales have to secure a second medical opinion and appropriate treatment, with particular reference to drug dependent prisoners. [9164]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Max Madden, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to respond to your recent Question about the rights of prisoners, detained in England and Wales prisons, to secure a second medical opinion and appropriate treatment, with particular reference to drug dependant prisoners.

Neither unconvicted or convicted prisoners have an automatic right to seek a second medical opinion from NHS or private health care services. Where however, a second opinion is thought necessary by the prison medical officer, arrangements are made for the prisoner to be examined by a visiting NHS clinician, or transferred to a NHS hospital for examination or treatment.

Notwithstanding the above, if an unconvicted prisoner wishes to secure a second medical opinion, he or she may be visited and treated in prison by a nominated doctor if the following conditions are met:

The inmate is able and willing to pay the expenses incurred.

The Governor is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for such a request.

A convicted prisoner does not have this automatic right.

In exceptional circumstances a prisoner, whether convicted or unconvicted, may receive in-patient treatment in a private hospital or clinic, or a private room in a National Health Service Hospital. For this to occur the medical officer must be satisfied that the following conditions are met:

Hospital inpatient treatment is necessary.

It is clinically advisable that the treatment is carried out during the period that the prisoner is in custody.

The treatment cannot be carried out in a prison service health care centre and

that the prisoner could be treated significantly earlier, privately in a hospital within reasonable distance of the prison than under NHS arrangements or

They had an appointment for private in-patient treatment before they came into prison.

The governor must also satisfy himself that:

The inmate has sufficient funds or adequate private insurance to meet all costs, including the bedwatch.

These conditions apply to all medical and dental conditions, including the treatment of drug dependency.

Prisons (Strip Cells)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many strip cells are currently in use in prisons in England and Wales. [9165]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Max Madden, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many special cells are currently in use in prisons in England and Wales.

The information requested is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Prison Medical Service

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison medical officers are currently in post in prisons in England and Wales; how many posts are currently vacant; and what were the equivalent figures in each of the last five years. [9168]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 16 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Max Madden, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of medical officers currently in post in prisons in England and Wales; the number of posts currently vacant; and the equivalent figures in each of the last five years.

Information on vacancies is not currently held centrally. I will write to you again when the figures become available. Data on the number of medical officers in post in prisons is only available centrally for the current and previous years.

The numbers of full-time and part-time doctors working in the Service at the end of March for the last two years are given in the attached table.

Doctors employed in the Prison Service: 1994–95 and 1995–96

	Full time doctors			*Part time doctors*		
Year	*Medical officer*	*Senior medical officer*	*Total*	*Medical officer*	*Senior medical officer*	*Total*
1994–95	96	49	145	136	0	136
1995–96	91	42	133	89	3	92

The figures include doctors employed in privately managed prisons except Blakenhurst which did not submit any staffing information.

Prisoners (Damages Claims)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of successful claims for damages by, and the amount of compensation that has been given to, prisoners who have sued the Home Office for being kept in prison too long, in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [9501]

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 17 December 1996]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of successful claims for damages by, and the amount of compensation that has been given to, prisoners who have sued the Home Office for being kept in prison too long, in each of the last five years.

Information on individual compensation claim payments made by or on behalf of prison governors to prisoners is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The total expenditure on compensation payments to prisoners for detention beyond the due date of release is:

1991–92: £25,982

1992–93: £13,510

1993–94: £18,351

1994–95: £53,009

1995–96: £31,941

Ms Alison Halford

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much public money *(a)* has been spent and *(b)* he estimates will be spent in respect of proceedings concerning Ms Alison Halford before (i) the Merseyside police authority, (ii) the industrial tribunal, (iii) the European Commission and (iv) the European Court of Human Rights, distinguishing in each case (1) solicitors' fees, (2) barristers' fees, (3) the cost of the time of other public officials and (4) the costs of the courts and tribunals in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [8862]

Mr. Howard: Part of the information requested is not available, and the rest is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Telephone Tapping

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what records are kept *(a)* by the Government and *(b)* by each individual police force concerning authorisations by senior police officers for the interception of telephone calls; how many such authorisations there have been by (i) Merseyside police and (ii) police forces in general in each year since 1984; what safeguards exist to prevent abuse; and how much manpower and cost they involve. [8853]

Mr. Howard: The interception of a communication in the course of its transmission by a public telecommunications system requires a warrant issued by the Secretary of State under the Interception of Communications Act 1985. A decision by a chief constable to monitor calls on a private telephone system operated by the police is not covered by the 1985 Act. Such a decision is an operational matter for the chief constable concerned, who is also responsible for ensuring that monitoring is appropriate in the circumstances and is not misused.

There is no central record of such authorisations by chief constables and the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Prison Costs

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the average cost of a place in prison during the first six months of the current financial year; [9111]

(2) what was the average cost of a place in each prison during the first six months of the current financial year. [9110]

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Tilt to Mr. George Howarth, dated 18 December 1996:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about the cost of prison places during the first six months of the current financial year.

The annualised costs of a place in each establishment are set out in the attached table.

The annualised average cost of a prison place in the first six months of the current financial year was £23,190. Spending, however, is not spread evenly across the year, and the additional funds provided this year to meet the rise in the population is not yet reflected in these half year figures.

Establishment	*Cost per place*
Acklington	14,703
Albany	19,182
Aldington	14,349
Ashwell	14,772
Askham Grange	18,362
Aylesbury	21,884
Bedford	22,358
Belmarsh	25,570
Birmingham	22,769
Blakenhurst	17,714
Blantyre House	18,257
Blundeston	19,526
Brinsford	18,703
Bristol	25,447
Brixton	24,207
Brockhill	22,279
Buckley Hall	15,631
Bullingdon	18,791
Bullwood Hall	28,525
Camp Hill	17,508
Canterbury	33,257
Cardiff	23,846
Castington	19,207
Channings Wood	14,753
Chelmsford	34,475
Coldingley	23,152
Cookham Wood	23,290
Dartmoor	19,679
Deerbolt	16,521
Doncaster	16,309
Dorchester	29,042
Dover	17,085
Downview	17,898
Drake Hall	12,909
Durham	25,991
East Sutton Park	15,986
Eastwood Park	26,320
Elmley	16,700
Erlestoke	18,594
Everthorpe	16,396
Exeter	33,040

The introduction of JSA and IB have been massive and complex undertakings requiring a great deal of planning and effort. The new benefits bring with them new computer systems, procedures, forms and regulations that have inevitably added to the Agency's workload. Since the introduction of JSA on 7 October 1996 the continued effort and commitment of my staff and those of our colleagues in Employment Services in bedding-in the changes and stabilising the benefit delivery processes has been considerable. Where it has proved necessary to ensure the successful delivery of these projects, additional resources have been made available.

The BA vision still remains to pay the right benefit, to the right person, at the right time, every time. Service to the public and the delivery of all other benefits has been and will be maintained.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what basis the figures for cases and savings projected in his press release on proposed housing benefit and council tax benefit changes 96/265 were calculated; and what estimate he has made of the geographical distribution of *(a)* the single people under 60 years who are private sector housing benefit claimants and *(b)* the band F or higher council tax claimants. [8512]

Mr. Evans: The information is set out in the table:

Geographical distribution of single housing benefit recipients aged under 60 without children

Region	*Caseload (000s)*
North	14
Yorkshire and Humberside	25
East Midlands	19
East Anglia	11
South East	150
Greater London	93
Rest of South East	57
South West	38
West Midlands	19
North West	46
Wales	20
Scotland	25
Total	366

Source:
HBMIS annual 1 per cent. sample enquiries with and without income support taken at the end of May 1995.
Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand, therefore component parts may not sum.
2. Information refers to deregulated tenants only.
3. Estimates for Housing Benefit are based upon the May 1994 HBMIS and Rent Officer data for the first quarter of 1996.
4. All figures have been uprated to the Public Expenditure Survey (PES) years using the Departmental Forecasting Report.

Geographical distribution of band F or higher council tax claimants

Region	*Caseloads (000s)*			
	Band F	*Band G*	*Band H*	*All*
North	1	0	0	1
Yorkshire and Humberside	1	0	0	1
East Midlands	1	1	0	2
East Anglia	1	0	0	2
South East outside London	10	4	0	14
Greater London	16	9	1	26
South West	4	1	0	5
West Midlands	1	1	0	2
North West	1	1	0	2

Geographical distribution of band F or higher council tax claimants

Region	*Caseloads (000s)*			
	Band F	*Band G*	*Band H*	*All*
Wales	2	0	0	2
Scotland	5	2	0	7
Total	42	20	0	63

Source:
HBMIS annual 1 per cent. enquiries with and without income support taken at the end of May 1995.
Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand, therefore component parts may not sum.
2. A "0" does not necessarily indicate that there are no cases, merely that the rounding is to zero.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of cold weather payments paid out in each region of Scotland in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [9072]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is contained in the social fund statistical series "Cold Weather Payments by District Offices", copies of which are available in the Library.

Benefit Fraud Hotline

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of calls to the national benefit fraud hotline are not pursued any further. [8922]

Mr. Heald: It is too early to give the number of successful or unsuccessful referrals generated by calls from the public to the hotline.

Mr. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was spent on advertising the freeline service in each year since 1992. [8925]

Mr. Evans: This is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Kevin Hughes, dated 17 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how much was spent on advertising the Freeline Service in each year since 1992.

Since its introduction in 1984 the Benefits Agency Freeline has not had a budget allocation for advertisement costs. The service and details of the telephone numbers were included in appropriate BA leaflets, claim packs and forms. The Benefits Agency Freeline closed in July of this year.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Disability Living Allowance

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the Government's policy in respect of removing the disability living allowance from those in hospital for more than four weeks; and how many representations he received in support of the changes. [9014]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: The Government's policy is set out in Cm 3233, a copy of which is in the Library.

We have received a number of representations. It is not possible to identify separately the number which were supportive of the changes; however, the majority either expressed concern or sought clarification.

National Disability Council

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the members of the National Disability Council and the terms of their appointments. [9147]

Mr. Burt: The members of the National Disability Council and the dates to which their appointments run are as follows:

David Grayson: 31 December 1999
Harry McConnell: 31 January 1998
Alan Smith: 1 June 1997
Doug Alker: 22 January 1998
Ann Foster: 22 January 1998
Colin Low: 22 January 1998
David Mills: 22 January 1998
David Roberts: 22 January 1998
Christopher Brocksom: 22 January 1999
Tanni Grey: 22 January 1999
Jim McAllister: 22 January 1999
Martin Reavley: 22 January 1999
Kevin Shinkwin: 22 January 1999
Alan Dickson: 22 January 2000
David Jenkins: 22 January 2000
Bert Massie: 22 January 2000
Philippa Russell: 22 January 2000
Jenny White: 22 January 2000

Mr. Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what proportion of the total budget of the National Disability Council is accounted for by administrative costs and the remuneration of members; [9149]

(2) what is the total annual budget for the National Disability Council. [9150]

Mr. Burt: The sum of £350,000 has been allocated to meet the expenditure associated with the National Disability Council during 1996–97. It is estimated that 48 per cent. of this amount will be spent on members' remuneration, travel and subsistence, meetings and the provision of the council's secretariat. The remaining 51 per cent. includes amounts for research and other non-administrative expenditure such as advisory and consultancy fees.

Disabled Investors (Building Society Payments)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what meetings he has had with Ministers outside his Department to ensure that investors with severe disabilities, whose account is managed by a third party, will benefit from payments to long-standing members by building societies planning to convert to listed companies next year. [9196]

Mr. Burt: I have been in contact with my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary about this complex and difficult issue. In addition, departmental officials have had a number of meetings with representatives of the various building societies that have announced their intention to convert to banks.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Minister of State for Social Security and Disabled People expects to reply to the letter from the chairman of the National Disability Council concerning the council's meeting of 21 November on bonus shares and cash payments from building societies; and if he will place a copy of his reply in the Library. [9322]

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social security if he will publish in the *Official Report* the text of the letter sent to the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People by the chairman of the National Disability Council following the meeting of the council on 21 November; and what reply he sent to the letter. [9195]

Mr. Burt: Yes. I will respond in due course to the letter and will arrange for it to be published in the *Official Report.*

Following is the information:

BUILDING SOCIETIES

The Council considered the issue of discrimination against disabled people in the distribution of bonus shares and cash payments on the floatation of building societies at its meeting on 21 November.

It is of the view that the current proposals for the flotations would leave many disabled people, who are not first named on their accounts, at a considerable disadvantage over their first named counterparts. Notwithstanding the technical legal arguments, it considers these arrangements to be discriminatory and totally unacceptable.

It believes that the Alliance and Leicester and Halifax Building Societies should be urged to reconsider their position and to put forward proposals which would have the effect that disabled people would not be worse off than other members of the building societies. If necessary, the Government should bring forward legislation to facilitate these changes and ensure that similar problems do not arise again.

The Council is prepared to continue discussion with the societies concerned in order to identify a solution.

Housing Benefit

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to make all payments of housing benefit payable directly to the landlord of the property concerned. [9190]

Mr. Roger Evans: None.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the impact of the changes to housing benefit in the Budget on *(a)* single unemployed people who have inherited a tenancy from their parents and *(b)* unemployed people who are widowed or divorced and left with the tenancy of the house. [8571]

Mr. Evans *[holding answer 11 December 1996]:* The proposed changes to the housing benefit scheme would apply only to tenants in the deregulated private rented sector. Generally, under such tenancies children do not have the right to succeed to an assured tenancy if the parent dies. We have no data to enable us to identify the status of the person who becomes responsible for the tenancy.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will consult on his proposals to let business pay national insurance contributions for minor expenses in a lump sum. [10461]

Mr. Lilley: I have today published a consultation document containing draft clauses on the alignment of national insurance contributions with tax under Inland Revenue PAYE settlement agreements. More than 200 organisations and individuals will receive a copy. The consultation period ends on 7 March 1997.

My proposal is to introduce a simple employer-only charge for national insurance to work alongside the Inland Revenue's single lump sum tax charge on minor expense payments and benefits in kind. This will mean that employers can enjoy a reduced administrative burden for contributions similar to that provided by the new tax arrangements. This is part of our continuing commitment to ensure that the administration costs of national insurance for employers are kept to the minimum consistent with the overall objectives of the contributory system.

I intend to include these changes in a Bill containing measures to simplify the national insurance system and improving compliance and administration of national insurance contributions for early introduction in the next Parliament.

Copies of the consultation document have been placed in the Library.

Pensions Levy

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the proposed *(a)* rates of the general pensions levy and *(b)* maximum amounts of the pensions compensation levy payable in respect of occupational and personal pension schemes from April 1997. [10462]

Mr. Heald: The proposed rates of the general pensions levy are set out in the table. The proposed statutory maximum of the pensions compensation levy will be £0.23 for each scheme member. The general levy rates and the maximum compensation levy will be specified in the Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Levy) Regulations 1997 which we intend to lay before the House by March 1997.

General levy

	Proposed rate
For occupational pension schemes with up to 11 members	£8.75 per scheme
For occupational pension schemes with 12 to 99 members	£1.05 per member
For occupational pension schemes with 100 to 999 members	£0.75 per member, subject to a minimum of £105.00 per scheme
For occupational pension schemes with 1,000 to 4,999 members	£0.60 per member, subject to a minimum of £730.00 per scheme
For occupational pension schemes with 5,000 to 9,999 members	£0.45 per member, subject to a minimum of £3,000.00 per scheme
For occupational pension schemes with 10,000 or more members	£0.30 per member, subject to a minimum of £4,500.00 per scheme
For personal pension schemes with up to 11 members	£3.60 per scheme
For personal pension schemes with 12 to 99 members	£0.30 per member
For personal pension schemes with 100 to 999 members	£0.21 per member, subject to a minimum of £30.00 per scheme
For personal pension schemes with 1,000 to 4,999 members	£0.17 per member, subject to a minimum of £210.00 per scheme
For personal pension schemes with 5,000 to 9,999 members	£0.12 per member, subject to a minimum of £850.00 per scheme
For personal pension schemes with 10,000 or more members	£0.08 per member, subject to a minimum of £1,200.00 per scheme

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the level of *(a)* basic state pension or equivalent and *(b)* second state pension paid to (i) a single person and (ii) a couple in (1) the United Kingdom and (2) each other European Union country, expressed (A) in cash, and (B) as a percentage of average earnings. [9350]

Mr. Heald: The standard rate of retirement pension for a single pensioner in Great Britain is £61.15 per week, representing 17.4 per cent. of average gross weekly earnings of full-time employees. A couple, where the wife receives a standard rate pension based on her husband's contributions, currently receive £97.75 per week or 27.8 per cent. of average earnings. At 31 March 1996 it is estimated that the average gross weekly additional pension in payment was £18.14 per week or 5.2 per cent. of average earnings.

Information on retirement pensions in EU member states is contained in MISSOC 1995, "Social protection in the Member States of the European Union", published by the European Commission, a copy of which is in the Library. Some details of levels of state pensions as a percentage of earnings are included in this publication; however, because of the diverse nature of state pension schemes in member states, many of which are based on earnings-related calculations, straightforward comparisons of benefit amounts are not possible.

Source:

Earnings figures obtained from the New Earnings Survey, April 1995 and April 1996.

Average weekly net additional pension is obtained from the Retirement Pension Bi-Annual Enquiry, 31 March 1996.

Notes:

1. The 1996 Abstract of Statistics, published in October, shows a different figure for standard rate retirement pension as a percentage of average earnings. This is because the figure published in the 1996 edition of the Abstract of Statistics is based on the provisional level of earnings in April 1996, while this reply uses the final figure.

2. The gross weekly additional pension is the notional amount before the deduction of a contracted out deduction (COD). A COD is deducted when a person has been contracted out of SERPS, the state earnings-related pension scheme, into a contracted-out pension scheme or an appropriate personal pension used in place of SERPS.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the income of each quintile of the pensioner population, expressed in current values and as a percentage of the average earnings of the equivalent quintile of the working age population in *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 2025. [9351]

Mr. Heald: Information is not available in the format requested. Estimated mean incomes for quintiles of the single pension and pensioner couple populations are given in the table for 1994 and 2025, at 1996 prices. Also shown in the table are estimates of the growth in mean income in each quintile between 1994 and 2025. All estimates have been made using Pensim, a dynamic simulation model that projects pensioners' incomes into the next century.

Although it is not possible to provide the estimates as a percentage of average earnings, Pensim estimates are based on a number of economic and behavioural assumptions, in particular that average earnings increase by 1.5 per cent. per year above prices. Real average earnings are therefore assumed to increase by almost 60 per cent. between 1994 and 2025. It is important to note, however, that earnings growth is likely to vary widely between quintiles of the working age population.

Due to the reliance on assumptions and the time period covered, estimates should be treated with caution, and have been heavily rounded. Further details of the methodology and assumptions used by Pensim are outlined in GES working paper No. 129 "Pensim: A Dynamic Simulation Model of Pensioner Incomes". Copies are available in the Library.

Mean net before housing cost income by population quintile: single and couple pensioners 1994–2025, (1996 prices)

	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*	*Q5*	*Mean*
Single pensioners						
1994	£60	£76	£91	£108	£181	£103
2025	£68	£99	£120	£158	£350	£159
Growth	15 per cent.	30 per cent.	30 per cent.	45 per cent.	95 per cent.	55 per cent.
Pensioner couples						
1994	£121	£150	£183	£235	£390	£216
2025	£151	£205	£260	£338	£606	£312
Growth	15 per cent.	30 per cent.	35 per cent.	45 per cent.	65 per cent.	45 per cent.

1. Estimates are based on uprated data from the 1988 Family Expenditure Survey, 1988 Retirement Survey and 1987 Social Change and Economic Life Initiative, in order to provide consistent estimates for 1994 and 2025. These estimates are not consistent with the 1994–95 Pensioners' Incomes Series, which is mainly based on data drawn from the 1994–95 Family Expenditure Survey.
2. Pensioners are defined as those single aged at state pension age or above, or couples in which the husband is aged at state pension age or above.
3. Figures have been rounded to the nearest £1 and 5 per cent.
4. Quintiles for single pensioners and pensioner couples have been calculated separately—i.e. the bottom quintile of single pensioners represents those pensioners in the bottom 20 per cent. of the income distribution of single pensioners.

Social Fund (Flood Damage Payments)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what help is available from the social fund to people on income support who have suffered loss and damage as a result of the recent flooding in the Folkestone area; and if he will make a statement. [10298]

Mr. Roger Evans: Disaster relief following any such crisis is essentially a matter for the relevant local authority. However, help is available through the social fund in the form of community care grants, budgeting loans and crisis loans. The particular circumstances of each application will determine which type of payment may be made. Access to crisis loans is not restricted to people on income support. Applications to the social fund are dealt with, as speedily as possible, by specially trained social fund officers who look carefully at the individual circumstances surrounding each application and use discretion and flexibility when forming their decisions.

On 22 November, Channel district reported a total of 28 community care grant awards had been made to people most affected by the flooding, at a cost of £13,392. I have therefore agreed that an additional allocation of £13,392, should be made immediately to reimburse Channel's community care grant budget.

Independent Tribunal Service

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Independent Tribunal Service expects to respond to the letter of 14 June from the hon. Member for Aylesbury about appeal Ref. 2/01/95/12694, N1 ZY11 0634A. [8947]

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 13 December 1996]:* This is a matter for the President of the Independent Tribunal Service, Judge Bassingthwaighte, who will arrange for a written reply to be sent directly to the hon. Member.

Information Technology (Euro)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what tenders his Department has put out to convert its information technology systems to be euro-compliant; what are the cost and person hours required to convert the systems to handle the euro; and when he expects his Department's systems to be fully economic and monetary union compliant. [9456]

Mr. Burt: This Department and its agencies will need to assess the impact which a single currency, assumed to be starting on 1 January 1999, would have on their information systems, whether or not the United Kingdom decides to participate in the third stage of economic and monetary union.

Staff

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* non-permanent staff there have been in (i) his Department and (ii) executive agencies of his Department in each year since 1992. [9627]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the tables.

	Permanent	*Non-permanent*
1 April 1992	78,277	2,985
1 April 1993	84,825	4,782
1 April 1994	87,134	5,536
1 April 1995	89,496	4,929
1 April 1996	91,536	4,501

	Benefits agency		*Contributions agency*		*Child support agency*		*Information technology services agency*		*Resettlement agency*		*War pensions agency*	
	Permanent	*Non-permanent*	*Permanent*	*Non-permanent*	*Permanent*	*Non-permanent*	*Permanent*	*Non-permanent*	*Permanent*	*Non-permanent*	*Permanent*	*Non-permanent*
1 April 1992	62,764	2,453	8,307	195	—	—	4,072	219	462	22	—	—
1 April 1993	64,056	3,562	9,370	331	2,937	42	4,069	501	359	23	—	—
1 April 1994	63,897	3,922	9,821	209	4,752	495	3,998	611	276	48	1,495	146
1 April 1995	66,687	3,473	8,889	491	5,974	205	3,540	387	133	5	1,295	263
1 April 1996	71,627	3,097	7,463	569	6,528	277	1,954	361	—	—	1,226	72

1. Staff on a fixed term appointment are included as permanent staff. 2. Numbers of staff are expressed as full-time equivalents.
3. Child Support Agency was launched on 1 April 1993.
4. War Pensions Agency was launched on 1 April 1994.
5. Resettlement Agency ceased to exist on 31 March 1996.

Benefits Inquiry Line

Mr. Steinberg: To as the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to reinstate the benefits inquiry line. [8074]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Gerry Steinberg, dated 16 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what proposals he as to re-instate the Benefits Enquiry Line.

I assume your question refers to the Benefits Agency Freeline which closed in July of this year. There are currently no plans to re-instate this service. However, the Benefit Enquiry Line (BEL) for people with disabilities remains open and continues to operate as normal.

BEL is a confidential advice line providing general information about all Social Security benefits to people with disabilities, their carers and representatives. Help can also be given to complete some disability benefit claim forms.

Customers who require help or advice can contact BEL by telephoning 0800 882200. Deaf or hearing impaired customers who have access to a textphone can call on 0800 243355.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Benefit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 2 December, *Official Report*, column *501*, how many new awards there were in each year since 1980 for *(a)* child benefit and *(b)* one-parent benefit; and what data are kept by his Department on the number of claims for these benefits which do not result in an award of benefit. [8192]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell *[holding answer 10 December 1996]:* The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the tables.

New awards of CHB 1980–1995: number of children

	Thousands
1980	1,093
1981	968
1982	1,020
1983	1,009
1985	1,003
1986	1,022
1987	1,033
1988	1,041
1989	997
1990	1,062
1991	1,063
1992	1,025
1993	1,000
1994	992
1995	981

1. Data is not available for 1984 due to industrial action in that year.
2. The figures include claims made on the birth of a child, claims from families entering Great Britain and repeat claims following a period of disentitlement.
3. Figures based on a 4 per cent. sample to and including March 1994, thereafter a 1 per cent. sample.
4. There are no reliable data on the numbers of claims which do not result in award, and no information on the reasons for such disallowances.

New awards of OPB 1988–1995: number of families

	Thousands
1988	136
1989	139
1990	155
1991	153
1992	156
1993	152
1994	146
1995	176

1. Figures based on a 4 per cent. sample to and including March 1994, thereafter a 1 per cent. sample.
2. Data on one-parent benefit awards is not available before 1988.

3. There are no reliable data on the numbers of claims which do not result in an award, and no information on the reasons for such disallowances.

Income Support Computer System

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what information is conveyed to claimants about their claim by the income support computer system used by the Benefits Agency; [9036]

(2) what information is provided to claimants who are notified of a mortgage interest direct overpayment in respect of (i) why the overpayment occurred, (ii) how much was overpaid and (iii) when and how recovery will be effected; [9038]

(3) on whose responsibility changes are made to the income support computer system; what plans there are for such changes; and, in each case, what is their priority. [9037]

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Andrew Smith, dated 16 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking what information is conveyed to claimants about their claim by the Income Support Computer System (ISCS) used by the BA; what information is provided to claimants who are notified of a mortgage interest direct overpayment in respect of (i) why the overpayment occurred, (ii) how much was overpaid and (iii) when and how recovery will be effected; on whose responsibility changes are made to the ISCS; what plans there are for such changes; and in each case, what is their priority.

The ISCS issues award notifications following an initial claim for benefit and on relevant changes of circumstances. These notifications inform the customer of the Adjudication Officer's decision, explain how the award has been calculated, the method of payment and their right of appeal.

The ISCS also notifies a customer when, on behalf of the Secretary of State, Income Support housing costs are to be deducted from the award, for direct payment to the mortgage lender, mortgage interest direct (MID).

In the event of a MID overpayment of £25.00 or less the amount is recovered from the Lender by adjusting the subsequent MID payments. The ISCS automatically issues notifications to the customer and the lender. The customer notification details how the overpayment has occurred, the amount overpaid and how recovery will be made, example at Annex A. Procedural guidance is available in the Income Support Guide for Housing Costs. I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Overpayments of more than £25.00 are repaid by the lender in a lump sum. In these circumstances clerical notifications are issued to both the customer and the lender. Again, the customer notification details how the overpayment has occurred, the amount overpaid and how recovery will be made, example at Annex B.

Decisions on whether to commission changes to the BA computer systems are my responsibility and that of my management team. These decisions are based on the business requirement and analysis of alternative solutions within the capacity available. Priority is normally given to enhancements in respect of legislative changes and other unavoidable and essential work.

The ISCS work programme to the end of 1997 includes enhancements to allow payments of the new Child Maintenance Bonus; to transfer records of unemployed customers to the Jobseeker's Allowance Payment System; to introduce a payment card facility; to improve accounting data and to implement changes to One Parent Benefit and the Lone Parent Premium announced in the recent Budget. All these changes are regarded as essential.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Income Support Appeals

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support appeals were heard by social security appeal tribunals in each of the last four quarters for which information is available; how many and what percentage were decided in the appellant's favour where the appellant *(a)* attended the hearing but was not represented, *(b)* was represented but did not attend, *(c)* attended and was represented and *(d)* did not attend and was not represented. [4801]

Mr. Roger Evans *[pursuant to his reply, 19 November 1996, c. 523–26.]:* The information that I gave regarding the figure and percentage of heard and decided appeals for the December 1995 quarter was incorrect. The information is set out in the table. The correct information is as follows:

Income Support Appeals		*March 1995*	*June 1995*	*September 1995*	*December 1995*
Total number heard and decided		11,674	9,583	10,720	8,620
Total number decided in appellants favour and percentage		6,033	3,777	3,841	3,057
		(51 per cent.)	(39 per cent.)	(35 per cent.)	(35 per cent.)
Decision in appellants favour:	Number decided	1,159	1,328	1,424	1,170
appellant only attended	Percentage success	43	45	43	43
Decision in appellants favour:	Number decided	1,983	480	257	209
representative only attended	Percentage success	78	66	49	48
Decision in appellants favour:	Number decided	1,456	1,473	1,533	1,156
appellant and representative attended	Percentage success	68	65	65	63
Decision in appellants favour:	Number decided	1,435	496	627	522
no attendance	Percentage success	32	12	13	14

Source: "Quarterly Social Scurity Appeal Tribunal Statistics" published by Analytical Services Division.

Income support (IS) recipients aged 65 and over with preserved rights to IS and with care charges above IS limits: average weekly amount above limit

	Residential care £	*Nursing homes* £
Male claimants	36.80	27.26
Female claimants	28.81	23.94
All claimants	30.48	24.54

Notes:
1. Amounts shown represent the average charge made in excess of the income support preserved rights limits.
Source:
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry November 1995.

Pensions (Cohabitees)

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the pension rights of unmarried co-habitating individuals whose partners have died, with particular reference to occupational pensions. [8181]

Mr. Heald: There is no legal obstacle to the payment of survivors' pensions to unmarried partners who are financially dependent on ex-members.

Under Inland Revenue rules, payments on a member's death may be made by a scheme to a surviving spouse or someone who was financially dependent on the member. Any question as to whether or not a person is financially dependent and/or entitled to a survivor's benefit is a matter for schemes to decide for themselves and will depend on the provisions made by the rules of the scheme.

Benefits (Durham)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in the Durham benefit area are currently in receipt of *(a)* family credit and *(b)* income support; and what is the total sum received. [8076]

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available in the format requested. The family credit and income support computer systems record details of the total amount of benefit administered. It is not possible to give a breakdown to show the amount paid by individual benefit areas.

Statistics are available which give the number of families in receipt of family credit and income support by Benefits Agency district. The Durham area is dealt with by Durham North district which includes offices at Durham, Stanley, Chester-le-Street, Peterlee and Seaham and Durham South district which includes offices at Darlington and Bishop Auckland.

The most recent details available are for August 1996 and are as follows:

	Number of families in receipt of family credit	*Number of families in receipt of income support*
North Durham	6,213	28,547
South Durham	4,254	21,228
Total	10,467	49,775

Figures are provisional and subject to change.

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the total cost of *(a)* income support and *(b)* family credit payments has been in each year since 1990 in Darlington. [9733]

Mr. Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

War Pensions

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many veterans have a disability assessed at more than 40 per cent. [8663]

Mr. Heald: Under the war pension scheme, awards may be made in respect of disablement due to service and in respect of disablement suffered by certain other groups, for example, by merchant seamen injured as a result of enemy action during the second world war. At the end of September 1996, the disablement of 106,572 war pensioners was assessed at 40 per cent. or more; 102,425 of these awards were in respect of disablement due to service in the armed forces.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what are the projected expenditure consequences arising from the implementation of each of the changes to war pensions outlined in the Budget; [8667]

(2) what savings will be made by ending the sending out of reminders to veterans to return claim forms or to seek an increase in entitlement. [8669]

Mr. Heald: The information is in the table.

Programme savings (£ million cash prices)

A minus sign indicates a cost

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*
War pensions mobility supplement 40 per cent. disablement gateway	1	3	4
Allowance for lowered standard 40 per cent. disablement gateway	1	3	5
Unemployability Supplement 80 per cent. disablement gateway			
Allowance for lowered standard no claims from over age 65	Combined for all four options		
Unemployability Supplement no claims from over age 65			
Widows rent allowance—no new claims	negligible saving		
Cease reminders to return claim forms	2	3	4
No copy decisions to third parties	not costed		
Abandon long-term assessment (LTA)	0	0	0
Require evidence to justify review	+neg.	0.5	1
Backdating—new rules	3	3	3
Align payment start dates	negligible cost		

Programme savings (£ million cash prices)

A minus sign indicates a cost

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000
Automatic War widow's pension for 80 per cent. and Unemployability supplement cases	–1	–1	–1
War widow's pension restoration for cohabitees	negligible cost		
Abolition of gratuities on remarriage/cohabitation	not yet costed		
Clothing allowance one rate (the higher)	0.5	0.5	–0.5
Funeral grants for 80 per cent. and Unemployability supplement cases	negligible cost		
Remove rank differentials for gratuities	–0.5	–0.5	–0.5
Total	5	10	15

1. Estimates rounded to the nearest £0.5 million. Estimates of less than £0.25 million are given as negligible.
2. Figures may not sum to totals due to rounding.
3. All figures are estimates of savings and costs of the proposed changes designed to simplify and rationalise the war pensions scheme and which are subject to consultation with the Central Advisory Committee.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultation he held with *(a)* the Chief Medical Officer and *(b)* the Royal National Institute for the Deaf on the medical evidence in relation to hearing loss of war pensioners; and if he will make a statement. [8720]

Mr. Heald: A copy of the texts of the medical advisor's address to the Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions which describes the consultation that has been held on this issue and gives the medical references on which the change in medical opinion has been based have been placed in the Library.

Child Maintenance Bonus

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of *(a)* the cost and *(b)* the numbers expected to gain from the introduction of the child maintenance bonus. [8867]

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: It is estimated that in the first year—1997–98—some 40,000 parents with care will qualify for a bonus at a cost of around £5 million.

Benefit Changes

Mr. Alan Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of *(a)* the changes in Government expenditure and *(b)* the number of people who will be affected by the proposals to change (i) rules on backdating claims, (ii) waiting days for the jobseeker's allowance, (iii) rules for war pensioners, (iv) disability living allowance claims from people between 65 and 66 years, (v) housing benefit, (vi) council tax benefit, (vii) lone parents' benefits and (viii) increases to non-dependant deductions. [8868]

Mr. Burt: The information is in the tables:

Changes to central Government expenditure

£ million

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–00
(i) Rules on back-dating claims	–90	–120	–135
(ii) Waiting days for jobseeker's allowance	0	0	–65
(iii) Rules for war pensioners	–5	–10	–15
(iv) Disability Living Allowance	0	–20	–45
(v) Housing benefit	–10	–60	–90
(vi) Council tax benefit	0	–15	–15
(vii) Lone parents' benefits	0	–60	–135
(viii) Increases to non-dependent deductions	–45	–45	–50

1. Figures shown are net savings to social security expenditure.
2. Savings are rounded to the nearest £5 million.
3. Savings from these measures included in Departmental plan.

Numbers of people affected by the changes

Thousand

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000
(i) Rules on back-dating claims	390	435	465
(ii) Waiting days for jobseeker's allowance	0	0	1,900
(iii) Rules for war pensioners	20	20	20
(iv) Disability living allowance	0	10	25
(v) Housing benefit	90	275	370
(vii) Council tax benefit	0	65	65
(vii) Lone parents' benefits			
One parent benefit	0	80	150
Income support	0	270	450
Housing benefit	0	55	105
Council tax benefit	0	45	85
(viii) Increases to non-dependent deductions	495	495	495

Numbers have been rounded to the nearest 5,000, except for jobseeker's allowance, where they are rounded to the nearest 100,000.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the impact of recent benefit changes on the workload of the Benefits Agency. [9308]

Mr. Roger Evans: This is an operational matter for Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 16 December 1996:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will make a statement on the impact of recent benefit changes on the workload of the Benefits Agency (BA).

There have been three main priorities for the BA in 1996/97, the delivery of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Incapacity Benefit (IB), continuing our main business of calculating and paying benefits to safeguard benefit spending, and beginning the process of restructuring our business for the future to meet the challenge of the Department's Change Programme.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 287**

SESSION 1996–97

9th December—18th December 1996

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

Other contributions by Speaker and deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates and Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

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Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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